
THE HAND WITH THE KEYS

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Pete. Page 8.

THE

HAND WITH THE KEYS.

BY

KATE W. HAMILTON,

AUTHOR OF "TANGLES AND CORNERS," "WOOD, HAY AND STUBBLE," "UNITY DODGE," ETC.

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THE HAND WITH THE KEYS.

CHAPTER I.

A DOOR OUTWARD.

IN a far-off corner of the wide grounds, quite away from the house, an old apple tree stretched its untrimmed branches far and wide—outward over the rough stone wall toward the winding country-road; inward over the deep grass, where the shifting shadows of its leaves wove strange patterns. One low, drooping limb, gnarled and twisted, formed a natural seat, and comfortably ensconced there was a young girl with sun-bonnet pushed back from her brown face and with a book in her hand. In the branches over her head a robin twittered his defiance of her presence. Through the lush grass at her feet a rabbit darted, and marauding bees, hurrying from the roadside daisies to the nodding tiger-lilies within the wall, buzzed loudly their admiration of their own industry. But the

young reader noticed none of them. She only stirred a little impatiently and turned a leaf with quicker motion when a call sounded from the house :

"Pete !"

Still, the book did not seem quite to satisfy its reader, for at last she looked up from it in a half-discontented, half-puzzled way :

"There is no end to it! Everything turns on something else ; it's all hinges. Whenever you come to a wall that shuts off everything, there's sure to be a door through somewhere. I wonder if everything we do is just a hinge for something else, and if all the happenings are only doors? I should think—"

"Pete ! Pete !"

A second call, quick and imperative, aroused the girl.

"Maybe they do want something this time," she said ; and, tossing her book on the grass, she lightly followed it. The bonnet, loosened from her neck, dropped beside her, and, throwing it carelessly over her arm instead of on her head—which, in truth, generally scorned a bonnet—she made her way across the sward to the path. A graveled walk of ambitious width it once had been, running

from an arched gateway to the great house, but the arched entrance had long since vanished, and the walk, worn into ruts and crevices by sun and rain and by the hurrying feet of many years, was intersected by patches of grass and sadly encroached upon by the bunches of poppies and sweet-williams which should have formed its border.

The house, large and lofty, but weather-stained and unpainted and fronted by a wide platform—the beginning of a piazza that had never been finished—was in keeping with the grounds. The double doors leading into a spacious hall were standing open, and as the girl neared the steps a frightened face suddenly flashed out upon her, and its owner, an old colored woman, called tremblingly as she hurried past,

"Oh, Miss Pete, we couldn't find ye! Be quick, chile; dar's somefin' awful happened."

"Something happened? Where?" The girl was in the hall in an instant, terrified and bewildered. "What do you mean, Deb? What is it?"

The woman had hastened up the stairs without waiting for reply or explanation, and Pete could only follow. On the landing a boy met her, and she caught his arm as he was rushing past:

"Dick, what *is* the matter?"

"Don't stop me; I must get the doctor," he began; but as he saw Pete's white face he paused for an instant. "Don't look like that, Pete. She fell—grandma did; fainted, or something. Don't be so frightened; some people faint often, you know. It's only queer for grandma. She'll be better soon. The doctor'll know what to do, and I'll have him here right away." The boy was gone with the last words, and, clearing the piazza with a bound, ran down the walk.

The girl clasped the balustrade to steady her trembling limbs, but the heavy hand that had seemed clutching her heart was loosened. Anything like illness was a relief, compared with the half-formed visions of terrible accidents that had flashed lightning-like through her brain. A swift thought reminded her, too, that it was not so strange an occurrence as Dick imagined. Grandma had complained of faintness several times lately, and an uncomfortable feeling in her head. This must have been a little worse than usual, that was all, and it had frightened poor old Deb. So reassuring herself, Pete was able to enter the room, to lift the unconscious head, to arrange pillows and bring restoratives. But, with all her faith in Dick's diagnosis and her own reasoning, it was dreadful to see the

motionless form and the livid face, and to witness her grandfather's anguish as he chafed the cold hands. She was so unused to illness, so ignorant of what should be done, that she was thankful when neighbors came in and she could yield her place to those who were more experienced.

It seemed long, as such time always does, the waiting for medical aid, yet in reality it was but a few minutes. Dick had been so fortunate as to meet the physician a short distance up the road, and his carriage stopped at the gate as Pete went down to the hall again. She knew him by reputation and by sight, as so important a member of the community was sure to be known even to those whose homes had not needed his services. So, also, she knew that the young lady who came with him was his sister and only a visitor in the village. They were out riding when Dick summoned him, the doctor briefly explained, and his sister would wait for him.

The young lady's quick eye read the slight embarrassment her presence caused—that her young hostess did not know exactly the proper disposition to make of her—and her low even voice and quiet manner promptly settled the matter:

"Only let me sit here by this window, please,

Miss Wilder—it is so much more comfortable than waiting in the carriage—and do not feel that you need pay me any attention."

Easy, graceful speech was not Pete's either by nature or by acquirement. She gravely nodded, allowed the lady to seat herself and silently led the doctor up stairs. There the group at the bed made way for him, and the girl anxiously lingered near the door to catch the words which should assure her that the attack was but a slight one and would soon be over. But the physician expressed no opinion, and his low-voiced questions and directions told her nothing. Still, his presence gave her confidence, though she shrank from the white, drawn face on the pillow and from the sound of the slow, oppressed respiration.

One of the women noticed the young girl and kindly insisted on her going away:

"You can't be of any use here; there's plenty to do everything there is to be done, and not much for anybody to do now, in fact, but to wait. And it only troubles you to see her so. You'd better go down stairs a while, and I'll call you if you're wanted."

Pete mechanically obeyed, and went back to the room where the stranger sat. The old clock in the

corner struck the hour, and she looked up at it in amazement. Could it be only so short a time since she had gone happily out of the house, book in hand, for her favorite nook? Everything had been so peacefully commonplace then, and her grandmother's voice—that brisk, cheery voice that ordered everything about the place—had called after her with its familiar injunction: "Do wear your bonnet, daughter! You'll be as brown as an Indian soon." How could so much have happened since? It was like a dream, this strange presence here, those others in the upper room and the unwonted stir about the house, while away across the lawn, its branches visible from the window, waved and nodded the old tree where she had lingered in such care-free, happy leisure only a little half hour ago.

With an uncomfortable feeling that utter silence might be construed into discourtesy, Pete tried to talk to the young lady. The effort would not have been a remarkable success at the best of times, so far as Pete was concerned, for the fluff of yellow hair, the perfectly gloved hands and the sweep of the silken skirt, with its marvelous loopings and drapery, marked one of those whom Pete and her brother Dick were wont to speak of

scornfully as "fancy articles" and "none of our sort." As for the stranger, she replied and questioned politely and pleasantly, but inwardly was only moved to a wonder which found expression the moment she was out of hearing:

"How odd of that girl to come down stairs and actually try to entertain me while her grandmother is so ill!"

It was a welcome release to both when the doctor entered.

"She is better?" said Pete, in mingled affirmation and inquiry.

"No; I can hardly say that—yet." The doctor spoke slowly and looked at Pete as if uncertain how much it would be well to tell her. "It is paralysis."

The physician's sister looked up with a quick comprehending glance, but the words conveyed no intelligence to Pete.

"I have done all that can be done for her. I will come again in the morning if—if there should be any need." He turned abruptly away then, as if to avoid saying more, and his sister barred any further question by her pleasantly murmured thanks and good-bye. As they reached the walk she glanced back at the house, and, forgetful of the

open window, her comment went floating into the room:

"What a queer place, inside and out! It looks like a mass of unfinished beginnings that had never come to anything."

Dick, with boyish dislike of manifesting any emotion before strangers, or even of meeting them, had kept out of sight, but the moment they were gone he confronted Pete anxiously:

"Well, what did he say?"

"Not much; he hurried away so," answered Pete, scarcely satisfied. "But he thought she would be better soon. At least, that is what he must have meant, for he spoke as if there would be no need of his coming again."

Dick's freckled, honest face brightened, and he softly whistled a note of relief:

"That's good! Fact is, Pete, I was considerably scared, though I wouldn't own it even to myself. I am glad, I tell you."

So was Pete. Her meagre information seemed to grow fuller with the weight of Dick's interpretation added to her own; and when the boy went cheerily out to bring in the wood and water for the evening, Pete looked out at the last slant sunbeams resting on the lilies and the poppies, and

felt that the world was once more almost her own comfortable every-day world: it soon would be; and, with a new sympathy born of the afternoon's experience, she pitied people to whom dreadful things did happen—really happen. Then, standing there, she suddenly remembered those last words of her visitor—words not intended for her hearing—and wondered what she had meant by them.

"'A mass of unfinished beginnings that had never come to anything,'" Pete repeated, looking around the large room.

The fireplace below the marble mantel was filled in by a board covered with cheap paper; the faded and dingy Brussels carpet, from which had been removed some pieces that had utterly outlived their usefulness, was supplemented by breadths of rag carpeting; a grand piano elaborately inlaid with pearl originally, and overlaid with dents and scratches since, stood in a corner: it was out of date, out of tune and covered with a plaid shawl which was also considerably past its first glory. All these details were familiar enough, but they had never impressed Pete as they did now.

"That's what it does look like—what it is, I suppose—a mass of beginnings: we haven't minded

much because we have always been waiting for the finishing to come, but it has been a good while—almost all my life," she said, slowly.

The life numbered seventeen years now. Pete had never thought of herself as a young lady, but it occurred to her that the young lady who had just gone away could not be more than three or four years older than herself.

"So I am almost old enough to be one, but I am only a 'mass of beginnings,' like the house," she concluded, with a glance at the old mirror in tarnished gilt frame above the mantel. The dark hair smoothly brushed back from her face and braided in one long stiff plait down her back, with the sole idea of getting it out of the way as completely and expeditiously as possible, the plain calico dress, the hands browned by exposure to all weather and bearing numerous scratches from rose-bushes and berry-vines, presented a marked contrast to the specimen of young ladyhood she had been considering; and for the first time in her life Pete was conscious of a lurking doubt whether the points of difference were so entirely in her own favor as she and Dick had always imagined. It was only a flitting thought; the next one was a wonder why she had not been summoned up stairs.

"Mrs. Leib promised to call me when I was wanted. I'm sure grandma will want me as soon as she is well enough to ask for me, and I think that ought to be by this time. I may not know much about sickness, but she will want me near her," she said, with the comforting conviction that, whatever her deficiencies as a nurse or a young lady, there was one place where she was first.

But the kindly eyes that had always brightened at Pete's coming did not notice the girl as she entered. They were still half closed and the strange heavy breathing was unchanged. Through an open door Pete saw her grandfather sitting in an adjoining apartment, his gray head bowed upon his hands. The hushed room, the strong odor of camphor, the low voices of the two neighbors, who still lingered, all oppressed Pete, and, though she did not quite know why, she shrank from asking any questions. She quietly passed to a window and sat down there alone.

The sun slowly vanished beyond the line of distant hills and the long twilight faded. Deb went down stairs and looked after the evening work. A few people came to the door, made inquiries and went away again, and the summer night settled down. Pete occasionally stole to the bedside and

watched for a few minutes for some sign of returning consciousness, only to go away troubled and perplexed by the still form and the breathing that grew more slow and difficult. It was hard to realize that it could be her grandmother lying there to be taken care of instead of watching over and caring for others. Her cheerful, motherly presence had always been the life of the house. Her hopeful, happy temperament had made the place and the circumstances and mode of life connected with it appear not as failure and hardship, but only as a waiting for the something better that was just about to come.

The great house was merely one of many grand beginnings, for its builder, Richard Wilder, was one who saw most things, especially his own projects and possibilities, in magnificent proportions. Versatile, ambitious and energetic, he abounded in wonderful schemes and mighty enterprises, and all his days had been just on the verge of achieving a fortune. A competence, indeed, had been more than once within his grasp, and had been risked and lost in the effort to capture some greater prize that lay beyond. Early in life he had married a prospective heiress—the inheritance never became anything more than prospective—and when she

died, leaving him an infant daughter, he confided the little one to the care of his father and his mother and plunged more deeply than ever into his various business ventures. Railroad-building, land-offices, silver-mining companies, or whatever it might be, each new speculation was sure to prove the most profitable in which he had engaged, and with firm faith in his own plans, and with a fluent tongue to persuade others to like faith, he was constantly pushing forward some great undertaking. He re-married soon, but the father and the mother, living quietly in a little country home in New England, had for years seldom seen the son who was too busy for visiting, and they never saw his second wife. Two or three years later he had discovered in the vicinity of this village of Western Pennsylvania some peculiarities of soil and water which suggested to him the probable presence of petroleum. Elated with the idea, he secured the services of one supposed to be an expert in such matters, and privately instituted a series of experiments that convinced him of the correctness of his theories. Then, purchasing the tract of land, he openly avowed his discovery and set about reaping his golden harvest. The little village rejoiced in a sudden breeze—or, rather, whirlwind—of prosperity. The unpretend-

ing "Traveler's Home," near the railway, blossomed out in wide wooden wings and yards of veranda and became the "Metropolitan Hotel." Stores and offices took on city airs of paint and plate-glass, and a forest of derricks sprung up in the suburbs. Mr. Wilder was offered handsome sums for his purchase, or for even a part of it, but he refused to sell. He held at last the solid foundation of a fortune that would satisfy him, and he meant to keep it in his own possession, he said; he had found a business that would do to settle down upon. It was with this triumphant feeling that he and his wife gave to their baby-daughter the somewhat fanciful name of Petra.

While the sinking of the wells and the putting up of requisite buildings progressed Mr. Wilder purchased another piece of ground, on the opposite side of the village, and began the erection of a house that might serve as a country residence, but the plans for its elaborate finishing and for laying out and beautifying the grounds were never carried into effect. The flow of oil from the first well steadily diminished, and boring deeper, digging other wells, and all the costly experiments born of desperation that followed, did not increase the yield, but gradually revealed the fact that the promise

had been delusive: it was all a failure. Whether the disappointment and the anxiety bore too heavily upon a proud and ambitious spirit and a physical frame naturally fragile, or from some other cause, Mrs. Wilder speedily drooped into a listless, unhappy invalid, and when her little son was born slipped out of a world that had not satisfied her.

With the failure of the petroleum enterprise the village dropped back into more than its former obscurity, and Mr. Wilder's property there was as valueless as a ship built too far inland ever to reach the ocean. It was all that was left him, however; he had put into the venture all that he was worth. He could not even dispose of the land for the modest sum he had originally paid for it, and there was little prospect of any growth in the village that would ever make the ground more valuable. The mounds of earth, the useless buildings and the great derricks standing like giant skeletons to blacken in sun and wind were abandoned, but the house he had built was tenable. He could neither sell it nor complete it, but he could use it. His parents were readily prevailed upon to come there with the little Kitty and take charge of the two younger children also, and then he gladly availed himself of a commission that would take him to Europe.

He had remained abroad ever since, now here, now there, always engaged in some great scheme that was to work wonderful results and bring wealth to those at home. When the village people heard, as they rarely did, of any of these great expectations, they laughed incredulously over the prospect of "Dick Wilder's ship coming in again," but the father and the mother never lost faith in "son Richard" and his abilities. They were simple, kindly people, content with their quiet life and devoted to the children, whom, after the manner of grandparents, they petted and indulged to the extent of their power.

The large garden and one or two cows furnished a considerable part of the family income, which was supplemented by occasional remittances from abroad. When these last were tolerably liberal, they were freely expended in the pleasant faith that the expected era of plenty was at hand; when, as oftener happened, they were scant and long delayed, the mother was only full of pity for Richard, who "must be hard pressed just now, poor fellow!" and she was cheerily certain that "for themselves they could manage to get along for a while." Getting along for a while was all that was ever planned for.

That house—"The Barracks" the neighbors had

long ago christened it—had been Petra's home since she could remember. Her name, like the other ambitious plannings about the place, had been cut short, and "Pete" was all that common use had left of it. It suited her well enough. So, too, her unfettered, careless life suited her. She had not thought of it as lacking advantages. Much which that term commonly signifies she and Dick had proudly scoffed at as disadvantages of the most absurd sort, and they wondered that Kitty could be so silly as to want to go away to the city to live. A relative of Kitty, a cousin of her mother, had invited the girl to spend two or three years with her, urging the benefit of superior schools and refined society, and the grandparents, sore-hearted at the parting, but unselfish, had accepted the offer. Pete openly rejoiced that she had no relatives to extend similar privileges to her. Dick declared that a girl who could climb into a cherry tree, jump over a ditch and go into a berry-pasture without screaming about snakes was worth "forty frizzled and ruffled girls who knew how to thump on a piano;" and Pete had very heartily accepted Dick's opinion and his praise.

But to-night, as Pete sat by the open window, alert to catch every whisper in the room, but with

nothing to busy her except her own thoughts, she found herself wondering whether things could always go on in this old fashion and what sort of a life it would make if they did. Her afternoon's reading, the strange presence of illness in the house, the chance remark of the doctor's sister, combined to awaken questions and reflections that were new. She remembered that the promised fortune which was to round all these beginnings into completeness was really no nearer now than it had been when she was a little child. Indeed, it seemed farther away if she could judge by the sums from abroad, which had grown smaller and less frequent, until of late there had been a long silence over which her grandparents marveled and worried. For herself, she had not thought much about it; she had known no lack of care or of love, and her absent father was little more than a name to her. But she began to realize, as she considered the matter, that his health and success must mean a great deal to her grandfather, who was now growing old; she had not thought how old until she saw the bowed gray head to-day.

Two or three hours passed away without any apparent change in the sufferer. A shaded lamp had been brought into the sick-room, and the

watchers softly arranged chairs and table in the position most convenient for the night. Pete was silently wondering whether they intended to stay, when Mrs. Leib came to her and said with an odd gentleness in her usually crisp, sharp tones,

"Hadn't you better go and lie down, Sis? Like as not there will not be any change till mornin,' and we can call you right away if there is. You'll be all tired out settin' here."

"Oh, I couldn't sleep; I'd rather be here," the girl urged; and the neighbor went away and left her with her head leaning against the window-sill, her eyes watching the starry sky.

Despite the protest of Pete, she must have dropped into a light slumber, for she had lost consciousness of her surroundings and her thoughts were confusedly trying to settle some tangle of happenings and hinges when she was aroused by a sobbing voice at her side.

"Oh, Miss Pete, it am comin' now," whispered Deb. "It'll be all ober 'fore de daylight."

"What? Who is coming?" questioned Pete, bewildered.

"Oh, chile, don' ye know there is any such ting as def in dis worl'?"

Death! The girl started to her feet. Her

grandfather was kneeling by the bedside; in the doorway stood Dick with white, frightened face, and even as Pete reached the foot of the couch Mrs. Leib said huskily,

"It's all over!"

A door had suddenly unclosed in Petra's life—a door that opened outward into eternity.

CHAPTER II.

"OVER THIS JORDAN."

THERE had come the strange days of bewilderment, the pitiful effort to stagger to the feet again which must follow such a crushing sudden blow, the slow awakening of stunned heart and brain to the keen anguish of realization, the dazed surprise of finding that the world must still go on after it has seemed to end, the intrusive persistence of common daily cares and petty demands that still make life move forward in ghastly mocking semblance of the days when it had a soul.

"Forty and five years together, and now it's all done! Forty-five years!" repeated the old man, now to himself and now to others, in the amazement of his grief. "Seems like 'most all of me is gone away. It—it wasn't like Mary to go and leave me. I don't seem to know what is left."

It was evident, as weeks wore away, that what was left would never again be the man who had

carried his years so blithely, going about the place in the vigor of his hale and cheerful old age, attending to the garden, the poultry and all that belonged to the grounds.

"Miss Pete," said Deb, standing in the doorway one morning, "dere ain't no meat in de house for dinner, an' no tea. De coffee's done used up too. 'Pears like tings didn't las' no time when all dem folks was hyer—Miss Kitty an' yer aunt Maria," she added, apologetically.

"She isn't my aunt," interrupted Pete. She had never liked Kitty's city friends, and she aroused from her despondent attitude to repudiate the relationship. It had hurt her that Kitty had come home to the funeral—weeping until her pretty eyes were disfigured, it is true, and declaring that she "missed dear grandma everywhere"—and then had gone away again as if she were only a visitor. And as for Miss Maria—Kitty's cousin instead of aunt—her way of tiptoeing about the house, patting Pete on the shoulder whenever she met her, and pouring out her platitudes of consolation in a voice that had no tone of real sympathy,—it had all been wellnigh intolerable.

"Mebby she ain't, chile, dat's so, but de coffee's

gone, all de same," said Deb, returning to the main point. "An' der ain't no meat for dinner."

"Oh, Deb, what does it matter?" answered Pete, wearily. "It is only a dinner, and no one cares what we have or whether there is anything at all."

Deb dissentingly shook her turbaned head:

"If 'twas jes' one dinner 'n no mo', ole Deb wouldn't trouble ye, honey; but dar's de nex' day, an' de nex'. Days won't stop comin', an' folks dat ain't called ter die has got to keep doin' jes' de same as when deir heart was in it. Somebody mus' take keer ob him." She nodded toward the figure seated in the old arm-chair where the sunlight slanted through the hall.

Pete's glance followed Deb's, noted the listless drooping of the form so lately erect, and awakened with a pang of self-reproach to the meaning of Deb's words. It was the old command—the hardest, perhaps, that ever falls on our mortal ears: "My servant is dead; now arise and go over this Jordan." At the river's brink we may have parted from our best beloved. On the hither side lie all the old sweet days, the happy work together, the precious memories, and we linger weeping. When the dark stream swept across

our path, it bore away all hope or care for any years beyond. Nevertheless, in one form or another comes speedily the mandate that must be obeyed: "Tarry not here to mourn. 'Arise and go over this Jordan'" to the duties that still must be done.

The first step was prosaic enough in Pete's case, but it was obedience.

"Well, I suppose I can go to the store and get whatever you want," she said, after a minute's thought.

In the drawer of an old desk near Pete lay a worn pocket-book; she took it up with a slow caressing touch as she remembered how often she had seen it in her grandmother's hands. It held but a few dollars—enough for present need, but it suddenly occurred to her to wonder where new supplies were to come from. She glanced toward her grandfather again, but his eyes were dreamily fixed on the dim, distant line of the hills, and she took up her hat and went out without asking him any questions.

It happened that the largest store in the village was also the post-office; and when the weighing and tying of Pete's various packages had been completed, the merchant bethought him of his

duties as postmaster and remarked with the freedom of country neighborliness and the familiarity of one who had known the girl from childhood,

"Oh, Pete, there's a letter here for your grandpa—come in this morning. Shouldn't wonder if 'twas from your father. It's from somewheres in Germany, nigh as I can make out the marks on it."

"Yes, it must be from him," answered Pete, her grave face brightening a little. "We have been expecting one this long time."

The postmaster well knew that, but he held the missive for a moment and scrutinized it once more before he handed it over.

"That don't look to me just like Dick's handwriting, near as I know it," he said, "but then he might easy get some one to back a letter for him. Might be in a hurry, you know, or have a lame hand. Likely it's from him."

The remark was intended to be at once suggestive and reassuring, but Pete did not understand it.

"Oh, it's from father, of course; no one else over there would write to us," she answered, slipping the letter into her pocket.—"I am glad it has come at last," she added to herself on her homeward way, with a thought that its contents would probably replenish that nearly empty pocket-book.

But the expression of pleasure was quickly followed by a sigh as she recalled the one who a little while ago had been watching with such loving solicitude for a letter from "son Richard." It had come too late.

"A letter from father," said Pete, placing it in her grandfather's hand, as she passed on to the kitchen.

But when Pete came back, a few minutes later, her grandfather held the letter with the seal still unbroken:

"You read it, child. It's none of Richard's writing—I know that—and I can't seem to—to make up my mind to open it."

The hesitating tone and the trembling hand were so unlike her grandfather! It was of that Pete thought as she took a low seat by his side and hastily opened the envelope. Then the opening sentence, in a strange handwriting, swam mistily before her eyes:

"It is my painful duty to communicate to you the sad intelligence of your son's death—"

Pete stared at the page, but her lips grew white and refused to utter the words. She turned the paper and sought the name of the unknown writer, as if so she might refute his tidings. Then she

looked at her grandfather. How could she tell him the sad news the letter contained.

"Grandpa—"

"Yes, child; read it."

"Grandpa—"

The old man turned at the sound of the faltering voice, and his eyes searched Pete's face:

"Is he sick? Is— Oh, it can't be that!" He laid his hand on the girl's shoulder, and silently she held the letter toward him, so that he too saw the words which had greeted her. He drew the letter nearer and read again, to assure himself that he had seen aright. Then he pushed the paper away and bowed his head on his hands. It was only for a minute. The outburst of anguish Pete had dreaded did not follow: the heavier blow that had preceded this had left heart and brain benumbed.

"Richard dead! My son Richard!" he said, slowly, as if trying to realize the meaning of the words. "Read what it tells us, daughter."

The details were meagre enough. Mr. Wilder's health had been failing for months, but he did not think his case so serious as his physician considered it, nor did he feel that he could take from business cares and excitement the rest that was imperatively

prescribed. Later his declining strength compelled him to a partial obedience, and he sought the baths at Ems. For a time he seemed to improve, but, flattered by these favorable symptoms into his old belief that his medical advisers had been unduly alarmed, he ventured to answer in person some business messages that had been sent him, expecting to return as soon as he had settled certain important matters. He did, indeed, return in a few weeks, but only to die. His papers and effects would be speedily forwarded to his family. The writer regretted that, so far as he had been able to inform himself, Mr. Wilder's means had been entirely invested in some business enterprises from which he had expected to reap handsome profits, but the event of his death had so changed and complicated these affairs that it was now doubtful if they could successfully be carried forward or any return ever realized from the money involved. A few explanations regarding the manner and place of interment, a few expressions of condolence, and the unknown correspondent had completed his task.

"And that was why he didn't write! Poor Richard! I might have known it," said the old man, softly. "I thought maybe he was coming home, but his mother has seen him first. She grieved so

because we didn't hear from him ; she'll be glad to see him—Mary will."

That was the thought over which grandfather lingered. The latter part of the letter he seemed scarcely to remember, but it was that to which Petra's mind soon returned with troubled questioning. She had no memory of her father, she had never even corresponded with him directly, and she could not feel his death as a personal bereavement. Her grief and dread had been chiefly for her grandfather. But this other matter connected with it grew more real and important as she studied it. The letter had brought, not the usual remittance, but, so nearly as she could understand it, word that there was nothing more to come—that there never would be anything more. The expectation of coming prosperity which had always colored the family life had been only a dream, and was ended now in this far-off grave, and even the comforts hitherto enjoyed might no longer be possible. She wondered whether there was anything beyond the nearly depleted pocket-book that she had laid away, and, though she shrank from troubling her grandfather with any inquiries that might awaken care or anxiety, yet the burden pressed so heavily as the hours wore on, the need of a fuller knowledge of

their circumstances became so apparent, that she ventured a few questions:

"Have you any money, grandpa?"

"Money, child? What do you want it for?" he asked, absently slipping his hand into his pocket exactly as he had done in Petra's childish days when she begged a penny for candy. Then he recollected: "No, daughter, I haven't any; I paid it all out. They came to me for one thing and another, you know, when your grandmother—"

"I know. I do not need it for anything now," interrupted Pete, soothingly. "I was only wondering whether there was any more than I found in the pocket-book, that was all."

"Your grandmother's pocket-book? Oh, yes; you'll find some there. And I was expecting money from Richard. Poor Richard! He always planned to do great things for us. And to think he has gone before me and it is all over! Seems to me 'most everything is over now. I'm getting to be an old man—I didn't think how old until the others went away."

Petra said nothing more; she only laid her hand tenderly on her grandfather's bowed head, while a firm resolve took root in her heart to shield him and to care for him to the extent of her power.

That afternoon Petra followed Dick down to the garden fence, and the two had a long talk in the shade of the gnarled old apple tree.

"Well," said Dick, lying at full length on the sward and plaiting the blades of grass while he talked, "I never thought much about it, or I'd have known there was only the place here and the garden. That ground over where the old wells are don't count for anything, even for pasture. But grandfather has always managed it all—"

"He will never manage it again," interrupted Pete, decidedly. That was one of the conclusions which she had reached that day.

"Then there has been money from father every once in a while," pursued Dick. "Some way, I always thought of him over there as a sort of bank that grandpa could draw on if there was any special need. I don't believe I ever thought much about himself," said Dick, with a touch of remorse in his honest boyish voice; "it was only about what came from there, and that it might be something wonderful some day. I can see now that it was only a possibility—or not even that—and that all we really had was here."

"Well, now we have got to make the best of it—we two," said Pete; "I am sure grandpa will

never be what he has been. And Deb—she can do the housework, can help a great deal, but we must earn the money."

Dick laughed a little at Pete's troubled tone:

"Oh, we'll find a way. Why, it's only earning your own living, Pete. I always expected to do that, and more too, only I hadn't thought about beginning right away. Other folks do it, and of course we can."

"But how?" questioned Pete.

That was the problem that had been perplexing Petra for hours, but, like most of its kind, it was not to be solved in a day nor all at once, but only little by little. After that day, however, Dick began to take up the work about the place in a new way. It was no longer a mere working under his grandfather's directions, doing what he was told to do, with but little thought on his own part and occasional boyish shirkings. There had come a new feeling of responsibility and of interest.

"I wish I could move that old well-tract into town and sell it off in building-lots," he said to Pete.

It was only an idle wish, but Dick and Pete discussed many projects impossible as well as possible in the long evening talks together which soon

grew into an established custom. For, though their grandfather took up some of his old tasks again—fed the poultry, cared for the cows and was ready to advise about the products of garden and orchard when Dick inquired—yet it was only in answer to such questions that he aroused to sufficient interest to think or to plan, and it was a concern that faded as soon as the subject was no longer pressed upon his attention. He did mechanically what he could do, but his mind seemed elsewhere. His physical strength had failed also; he had grown old in a few weeks, and almost unconsciously he dropped the reins into Dick's young hands. So more and more Dick consulted Petra, and out on the old porch, in the moonlight, they counted what the potatoes would probably bring and planned where to dispose of the apples. There were chickens and eggs also, and an occasional roll of butter; so that the pocket-book did not get quite empty.

"But I never knew until lately that there were so many ways for money to go," said Petra, relating the story of her twistings and turnings. "I am always stretching what we have to make it reach around, and it always falls a little short."

"I mean to have more next year," said Dick, with the assurance of youthful enthusiasm. "We

can plant the garden closer, and early vegetables will pay, I'm sure, if we carry them to Ridgley. That's what I want to do another season."

That appeared feasible, and Petra caught at it eagerly and aided Dick's planning with suggestions of her own. But she was growing wonderfully practical in these days that had so transformed her life, and she soon came back to the present:

"But that is next year, Dick, and the rest of this year must come first—a whole winter, when there will be nothing coming from the orchard or the garden. We shall have vegetables for our own use, and milk; that will go a great way, but there are so many things that cost money! I think it will be in the winter that we shall most miss what has been coming to us."

That view of the case received confirmation in a message that Dick brought to his grandfather one day.

"It's about that interest," said the old man, studying the paper absently at first, then with returning recollection. "I didn't think about it's being due yet; I'd forgotten that the season was so far along. October, ain't it?"

"Interest on what?" asked Dick. The word had a formidable sound.

"On that mortgage which Squire Gwynn holds. Queer that the matter should have slipped my mind."

Petra and Dick looked at each other in consternation.

"A mortgage on this place, grandpa? I didn't know there was any," said the boy, trying to speak unconcernedly. He was learning to feel with his sister that, whatever happened, grandpa must not be worried.

"Not a heavy one—only two hundred dollars. Oh yes, you must have heard about it, but likely you didn't pay any attention, you children. It's been four or five years now—ever since we built the barn and put a new roof on the house. But the squire don't care for that so long as the interest is paid, and he will not crowd about that, either; he knows he's safe enough. Your father wanted me to get more at the time and finish off the house and fix up the place. He was busy with something then that he was sure would square off everything in a little while. But I thought I'd rather do just what had to be done and wait for the rest. I've always kept up the interest well enough with what he sent, but now— I don't know—" He looked troubled and bewildered as

he turned the paper over. "I don't seem to be good for anything any more."

Petra quietly slipped the note from the old man's hand and drew his head down upon her shoulder.

"Never mind, grandpa; we'll manage it somehow," she said, with that strange bravery of womanhood which springs into being so suddenly where one loved and helpless is to be shielded.

Dick nodded his head approvingly and whistled his cheeriest tune as he walked away to the barn. But, once inside the doors, the whistle changed to a prolonged "Whe—w!" and, thrusting his hands into his pockets, he stood still and stared at the floor. It was a very sober fit of meditation, but it resulted in no more satisfactory conclusion than that he understood very little about the matter, that it was very important he should understand it fully, and that he dreaded to question his grandfather further. Then there flashed upon him the suggestion of a talk with Squire Gwynn himself. "I'll at least know the worst and the best of it, and have the satisfaction of telling poor Pete what it all means," he thought; and, settling his hat on his head with a determined air, he marched off toward the village.

Pete, going in search of Dick a little later, was

disappointed at not finding him. He did not come at the usual supper-hour, and, though Deb delayed the meal a little, it was finally served without him. Even Pete's not very active imagination was busy with uneasy conjectures when the familiar click of the gate at last announced his coming. It was a very business-like face and manner that greeted her.

"I've been to see the squire," he said, in answer to his sister's questioning look; and as she sat beside him while he ate his supper he told her what he had learned: "Squire Gwynn was very pleasant and explained it all when I told him why I wanted to know. He said he would give us plenty of time and we can pay the money whenever we find it convenient."

"I'm afraid we shall need a good deal of time before we shall find it convenient to pay two hundred dollars," said Pete.

"It isn't two hundred now; it's only eighteen—the interest, you know."

"But it will be eighteen dollars every year until we can pay the two hundred—eighteen dollars that will not seem to do us any good, and that it will be hard to raise. I'm sure it will be hard this year. It's having to pay out so much for the

privilege of being too poor to pay out a great deal more," urged Pete.

It was a view of mortgages and of interest which Squire Gwynn would probably have combated, but it was one which impressed Petra so strongly that it made her wakeful far into the night, and as soon as the work was out of the way the next morning —a bright, crisp October morning—she set out for a walk without telling any one her errand. She had carefully selected a time when Dick would be out of the way and his questioning avoided, but she found him waiting for her when she returned.

"Where in the world have you been, Pete? Deb didn't know, nor grandpa. I've got something to tell you," he added, too impatient to await her answer. "I went to see the squire again to-day. He asked me to come; he said he had something he wanted to talk to me about, but he hadn't time last night. I didn't tell you, because I thought I'd see what it was first. Well, he wants me to take care of his horse this winter, and split wood for the fires at his house and his office, and a lot of work of that sort. So, you see, we have ways of making money in the winter."

"Yes, I see; I have been to see for myself,

too," answered Pete, with a brighter color in her face than it had known for weeks.

"Where did you go?" asked Dick, abruptly dropping his own story as his curiosity concerning his sister's trip awakened again.

"I went to the medicine-factory—the one out this side of Ridgley, you know. I thought about it last night. I was trying to think of some way to straighten things out, and I remembered that some girls worked there. I didn't know whether there would be any place for me, but they gave me one in the— I don't know what they call the room, but it is where they fold the papers and notices that they put in with the bottles. It will be a pretty long walk—nearly a mile—every morning, but I can get up early, and they work only from half-past seven till five in winter. They pay five cents a hundred for folding the papers. I don't suppose I'll earn very much at first, but I think I can learn to work fast."

"You will if anybody does," declared Dick, in hearty appreciation. "That's what I call plucky, Pete. You are worth a dozen common girls—the kind that only can wear ruffles and play the piano and cry when anything is the matter. Not that you'll need to work this way long," he added, in

boyish self-confidence; "it's likely I can support this family myself pretty soon."

Pete received the compliment in silence. She was not quite so sure as she would once have been that Dick's estimates and comparisons were correct. On her walk that day she had met the doctor's sister again—the same dainty, stylishly-attired bit of young ladyhood that she had at first appeared to be. But Pete had learned that she was a teacher in her city home and received a salary that seemed to the country-girl, in her present straits, munificent.

"Say what we like about ruffles and white hands, and all that, she can earn more than I can," said Pete to herself that evening. "She knows more than I do."

For herself, Petra could not wish that she had left those who had needed her in the old home, but she did regret that she had not made more of the advantages she possessed, and she began to doubt the superior wisdom which had made her so carelessly contemptuous of some opportunities within reach. She made some vigorous resolutions in regard to study and improvement as she nestled her head on its pillow that night, even though she was to begin the next week as a factory-girl.

CHAPTER III.

THAT QUEER OLD WOMAN.

MRS. MEGGS carefully adjusted the shutters of the south window and threw those of the west window wide open, remarking, with her mouth full of pins, that no one could see in from that direction.

"You mean there ain't anybody to look," answered her sister, Miss Loretta, with the little giggle that always completed her sentences.

"Well that's so," Mrs. Meggs explained to the patient caller who was submitting to a course of pinning, basting and fitting. "You see, this window opens right across to the Holland place—Colonel Bradley Holland's, you know. Of course the house fronts on another street, but we can see the side door and carriage-drive, and all that. Handsome place, ain't it?—Anybody come out yet, Loretty?"

"Not yet, te he!" said Miss Loretta, mirthfully.

"It ain't that I'm ashamed of doing a little

dressmaking Thanksgiving morning; the day ain't Sunday, if it does seem 'most like it," said Mrs. Meggs, defensively, returning to her first observation. "I don't mind doing a little to oblige when a bit of work has been put back like this and there don't seem to be no other time. But there's some folks, if they once got an idee I'd work holidays, would never stop coming. Any ways, it's more respectable not to."

It was soon evident that seclusion was not the chief attraction of the west window. Miss Loretta seated herself close beside it and divided her attention between her sewing and the great house opposite.

"There's the carriage!" she announced.

Mrs. Meggs paused with a pin poised between her thumb and her finger and looked out.

"Close carriage this time, and the bays," she commented. "They do have the nicest turnouts!"

Presently another of Miss Loretta's watchful glances was rewarded.

"There they come now," she cried, excitedly—"her 'n that Miss Wilder."

Mrs. Meggs flew to the window and watched while two ladies descended the steps and entered the carriage. The flitting vision of silk and velvet appeared to afford her great satisfaction.

"She had on a plum-colored satin, and the girl some kind of a brown suit; she whisked into the carriage so quick I couldn't tell just what it was," she said, with a long breath, as the vehicle disappeared down the drive.

"And now in a few minutes the old woman'll come out and trot off on foot. It's so funny!" tittered Miss Loretta. "'F I was him, though, I'd be ashamed to have my mother walk while them that wasn't so near to me went in carriages."

"He can't help it, and you know it, Loretty," said Mrs. Meggs, reprovingly. "'Tain't right to talk as if he could.—You see," she continued, turning to the visitor, who was growing bewildered by the confusion of pronouns and all this unexplained interest, "the old woman is sort of crazy-like—not to hurt anybody, but just queer. All the rest in the house have their silks and their laces, but she wears only the plainest clothes. She won't put a foot in one of their grand carriages, but walks wherever she goes, or takes a street-car like any poor woman. They say her room ain't furnished as the rest, either, and that she hardly calls on the servants for anything."

"And it ain't for want of money—money of her own too," added Miss Loretta—"for there's this

son, Bradley, and Clinton, and another one, I believe, and all of 'em well off—importers, or something like that, with mills and I don't know what all here and there. And they pay her so much every year for their father's interest in the business. Land knows what she does with it all! Folks say she's a miser and just hoards it up. Wish I had some of it; I could make it fly, te he!" and Miss Loretta coquettishly shook out her calico flounces and tossed her head until her gilt ear-rings jingled.

"They say he's going to be married again soon —Colonel Holland," pursued Mrs. Meggs. "His wife's been dead five or six years, and his cousin's been keeping house for him; it's likely she'll go away now. I s'pose the new wife'll think she's married a grand fortune, but there ain't no good things in this world without some set-backs, and how she'll get along with a crazy mother-in-law—"

The moralizing was cut short by another of Miss Loretta's little shrieks:

"I told you how 'twould be! Here she comes now, in that same gray dress she's worn all fall, and last year too, for all I know. Ain't it funny?"

Yet, without a knowledge of the circumstances thus related, no one would have discovered anything remarkable in the slender little woman who passed out through the lawn carrying in her hand a small paper-covered parcel and walking quietly down the street. Her plain dress—neither coarse nor unbecoming—was of some soft fabric that in color and style well suited her pale face and her smooth gray hair. She had a gentle, somewhat sad expression, and the eyes which had lost their youthful brightness held the patient, steady look of one who had suffered rather than any gleam of wildness. There was a slightly timid, deprecating air about her, but the face was not a weak one. Through the bright November sunlight she took her way to a different church from that at which the carriage had stopped, and, entering, passed noiselessly to a secluded seat under the gallery.

"Always sits in that same pew, and it ain't a particularly choice one, either, to my mind," the sexton explained, in a whisper, to a friend in the vestibule. "And she pays just as much for it as she would pay for a better one."

In the handsome pew, richly cushioned and carpeted, in the other church, were several members of the lady's household, but here she sat quite

alone. The organ notes and the glad anthem of praise and thanksgiving died away, and the prayer followed. But that she was such a timid little woman and her figure so motionless in its shadowy corner one might have thought that it was from her lips the low "Amen" sounded when the earnest voice of the petitioner pleaded for the removal of "the fraud, avarice, intemperance and corruption that so imperil the glory and safety of our land."

The sermon recounted the blessings of the year, the prosperity of the community and of the congregation. Then it touched upon the obligation these things imposed—sympathy and help for the unfortunate and suffering—and as the speaker pictured these in sharp contrast with the comfortable lives and homes represented by those before him, the plain straw bonnet bent lower until the wearer's face was hidden upon the railing of the pew in front of her.

"Exactly as if she were one of the poor ones herself, as she always seems to imagine, and his description recalled all the hardships she had endured!" silently commented one sitting near her—one not too deeply engaged in the service to bestow curious glances upon a fellow-worshiper.

But the object of this comment was unconscious of it. She seemed to have forgotten all around her until the sermon ended and the customary contribution for the poor was asked; then she hastily lifted her head and dropped into the basket a bill whose careful folding did not quite conceal the fact of its high denomination.

As the lady passed out a few exchanged greetings with her, but she lingered a little, as if to avoid observation, and reached the street alone. She did not go toward home, but turned in an opposite direction, and presently signaled a street-car that bore her away from the broad thoroughfares and the handsome houses to a different part of the city. A small store opening from a narrow street and bearing the sign "Worsted and Knit Goods" was the place at which she stopped. A little bell fastened above the door jingled sharply as she entered, and from a sitting-room back of the shop a young woman appeared in answer to the summons. She turned as she saw who stood at the counter, and said something in a low tone to a visitor back in the room, and she too arose and sauntered into the store.

"Oh, Mis' Holland, it's you! Brought some work?"

The tone and the manner were an odd combination of almost contemptuous familiarity and patronage with an evident effort to be respectful.

"I have brought those mittens." The little woman unfastened the bundle with fingers that trembled slightly. "I could not bring the scarf to-day: I stopped at church."

"All right; there ain't any hurry. You'd like the pay for these now, I s'pose?"

The shopkeeper winked at her friend as she asked this question. It was not so delicate an aside as to be unobserved by the person before her. A faint flush swept over the gentle, faded face, and the voice which answered held a touch of dignity and firmness that it had lacked at first:

"If it is convenient."

Looking at the little woman's face just then, a keen observer would have decided that, though no human possibility could ever make of her a Jael or a Deborah, she might be of the stuff of which martyrs are made. She could never battle for her principles, but it was not improbable that she would die for them.

The shopwoman was not observant. She only laughed and remarked carelessly, as she turned to the till,

"Money always comes handy, I guess."

The momentary flash of spirit—if, indeed, it could be so called—had vanished. The little woman received her money, turned it slowly over in her hand, hesitated, and then asked meekly whether there was any more work ready for her to take away with her.

"Well, I don't know. There wouldn't be any for most folks, times is so dull, but, seeing it's you, Mis' Holland—"

The sentence ended with a patronizing smile, and the shopkeeper went to the shelves, took down worsteds and gave an order for more mittens and scarfs, rolling up the material while she talked. Then, as the door, with another rattle of its unmusical bell, closed upon her caller, she turned to her companion:

"Do you know her? She's that queer old Mis' Holland, mother of the rich Holland brothers, and she's worth her thousands on thousands."

"She is! What on earth does she want to work for you for?"

"Dear knows! Just because she's queer I s'pose—crazy, some folks call her. That's why I told you to come out here: I wanted you to see her. She's just as anxious to get the work as if she was

some poor soul that had to earn her own living. That's what they say she does think."

"What does she do with her money?"

"I can't tell you that. Folks say she is a miser, but she ain't; she's just got some queer cranky notions in her head. She happened in here one day last winter, asking for knitting in just that same way, as if her life depended on it, when one of the poor young ones in the neighborhood—and land knows there's enough of 'em!—came in and wanted to get a pair of coarse cheap stockings for her mother. She said she'd got her feet frost-bitten with being out in the cold so much, and, besides, it made her cough worse. The child's own hands were blue with the cold, and she wasn't half dressed. Old Mis' Holland looked and listened for a minute or two, and then she whisked out a fat pocket-book—not the little purse she puts the money she earns in, mind you—and bought stockings and mittens and underwear as if money wasn't no object. She went home with the child and fixed 'em up pretty comfortable, I guess, before she left. Then a few days later she dropped in here again and asked me a lot of questions about the folks around here: did I know many poor and was there much suffering? Well, you know what Robin

street and around Brink Corners is like. So I told of one thing after another I'd been knowing to, and she listened with the tears running over her face, and finished up by giving me a roll of bills to help such cases with as I found 'em—a 'trust fund' she called it—and told me to let her know when it was gone."

"'Most felt like being one of the needy yourself, didn't you?" questioned the visitor, suggestively.

"Oh, I like money as well as anybody, but I never yet wanted it bad enough to keep what belonged to poor folks," answered the shopwoman, with an earnestness that for a moment redeemed the coarseness of her face. "I'll warrant you she found it out, too, before ever she left the money with me. She's sharp enough for that, if she *is* crazy. But, bless you! she's kept on wanting work just the same old way. Sometimes I've let her do it when we didn't really need it for the trade, seeing it was such a comfort to her, and paid her out of her own money. I didn't think that was no harm so long's I give the stockings and mittens to the poor when they was done."

"Mebby she'll take a fancy to you yet and leave you all her fortune," said the visitor, in a romantic burst of imagination.

"Wish she would! One thing's sure: I wouldn't always been so polite and obliging if she hadn't been Mis' Holland. If such folks has crotchety notions, they can afford 'em, I s'pose."

Mrs. Holland had taken a street-car again, and was traveling homeward. A few people in holiday dress and evidently wending their way to Thanksgiving dinners shared the car with her. Among these were a group of girls chattering, in the girlish fashion that is too common, of their doings, belongings and companions, in utter disregard of those around them. One of the latter, absorbed in her own thoughts, paid little heed to them, however, until she was startled by her own name:

"Barbara? Oh, haven't you heard? She's to marry Colonel Holland—at least, that is the rumor. Fan said she thought that would be the end of it when she saw them at the Island last summer.—Oh, Sue, you selfish creature! eating up all those caramels while I talk!"

In vain was the mother's head eagerly lifted and in vain were earnest glances bent upon the group. They had dropped the subject that so interested her, and, though she listened attentively to every word that thereafter fell from their lips, they did

not touch upon it again. Who were they? and what did they really know? she wondered. But she learned nothing, for after riding a few blocks they all left the car together—a dissolving view of bright colors and exuberant life—and vanished from her world as suddenly as they had entered it. But the thoughts and the questions they had awakened remained, and it was because of these that she joined the group in the parlors when she reached home.

Very pleasant the rooms looked that autumn day—luxurious and beautiful enough in all their appointments to have banished care and trouble if wealth could do it. A cheerful fire blazed on the marble hearth, and a bright-faced boy of fourteen, seated near it, arose as the old lady entered:

"Take this chair, grandma."

It was the unconscious utterance and movement of habit rather than any special token of thoughtfulness, for he was petting and teasing a handsome spaniel, and continued his occupation without hearing the thanks accorded him as he dropped to a low seat on the rug. Sliding-doors afforded a glimpse of a conservatory with a summer-like glory of foliage and bloom. There were creamy roses and crimson buds in the vases about the room, a scarlet spray was in the black hair of the tall lady who

was moving about with the air of a mistress, while the young girl chatting with a guest in a cozy window-seat wore dainty blush-roses at her belt.

"Flowers everywhere, Miss Kitty," began the guest, admiringly. "No; Mrs. Holland does not wear any."

Possibly the speaker noted still greater differences of attire between the others and this one who had just entered. Kitty fancied he did, and explained very briefly:

"Grandma does not care for hot-house blossoms."

"Is Mrs. Holland your grandmother? I did not know—"

The slight stiffness of the girl's manner had suggested a change of topic, but this second venture was hardly more happy. Kitty's face flushed, though she could not have told why, and she answered hastily:

"No; we all call her so, but really she is only Laurence's grandmother." Then she appealed to the tall lady before mentioned: "Cousin Maria, can you find that volume of engravings we were looking over yesterday? I'd like to show it to Mr. Grey."

Mrs. Holland, with eyes bent upon the dancing flames, seemed for a time lost in meditation. Per-

haps it was the sight of her own hands lying idly in her lap that recalled her. She turned to the boy:

"Laurence, I left some knitting on a table in the upper hall; will you get it for me?"

Laurence gave the spaniel's ears a parting twitch and arose. Apparently he had thought of summoning some one to do the errand, but he changed his mind as he reached the hall, though he muttered something—a sort of good-natured grumbling—about "grandma's being so very particular in always wanting a fellow to go himself."

"And I think it is just what you ought to do if your grandmother prefers your services," said a gentleman who descended the stairs in time to overhear the remark. "Don't get too lazy, Laury."

"There are several people in this house who don't do all that grandma wants; they'd have their hands full if they did," returned the boy, daringly; and then, with a laugh that was intended to atone for the speech, he prudently ran up the stairs without awaiting a reply.

The only guests at dinner that day were two gentlemen, one of whom had a business appointment with Colonel Holland, but their presence,

even more effectually than that of a greater number, precluded private conversation. The table, glittering with crystal and silver, was faultless in its furnishing and supplied with the choicest viands. Miss Maria took pride in always having an elegant table. Mrs. Holland did not seem to share the feeling. She followed her usual custom and allowed herself to be helped only from the simpler dishes—choice and tempting enough, certainly, but Miss Maria was so sure that something more than taste influenced the selection that she remonstrated in an undertone when a basket of costly hot-house fruit was passed untasted:

"Dear me, grandma! They're bought now and paid for, and they'll only spoil if they are not eaten. You might as well take some."

The low words—half tolerant as toward one too weak to be responsible, half impatient as combating the senseless whim of a child—brought again that faint flush to the old lady's face; but she only declined once more with a slight shake of the head and a smile. Whatever hope she had entertained of learning at once the truth or the falsehood of the statement heard in the street-car was necessarily put aside, and, dinner over, she soon sought her own room. It chanced, however, that on the stairs

she met her son. He was going for some papers to be looked over in the library and it was not a propitious moment for such an interview, but it might be hours before she would see him again, and her interest was too intense to let even such an opportunity pass. She laid her hand on his shoulder:

"Bradley!"

"Well, mother?" he laughed. "You are such a little mother that it is a very good plan for you to stand a step or two above me when you want to talk. What is it?"

"I heard to-day—" She hesitated. "It sounds strangely to ask such a question so abruptly, but is it true that you are intending to marry again?"

Surprised Bradley Holland certainly was, and for a moment annoyed also, but the latter feeling was promptly repressed, and he laughed again, though with a touch of embarrassment:

"That is springing a very important subject upon a man pretty suddenly, isn't it? Suppose I say 'Yes'?" Then he added, more gravely, "It is a matter that has been only very recently decided, though, of course, it is one which has been in my thoughts for some time. It is a marvel to me how the public gets hold of such items. I would have told you at once, mother, if—" He

paused, not quite liking to complete the sentence by saying "if it had occurred to me," though that would have been the literal truth. The old mother, whom he had long considered childish and full of queer crotchets and notions, was to be indulged, made as comfortable as possible by all in the house and "got along with" as best they could; but he no more thought of consulting her than of seeking Laurence's advice on any business venture. Now that she had heard of this, however, and seemed so interested, he was sorry that he had not told her. It might have pleased her. Something of the sort—a half apology—he began to utter, but his mother was not thinking of any neglect or want of consideration, or of herself in any way. She had a deeper interest, and scarcely waited for his words of explanation.

"And do I know her, Bradley—this lady who is to be your wife?"

"I think not; I'm not quite sure. Do you remember Miss Graham—Barbara Graham?"

Mrs. Holland repeated the name as if it had a familiar sound, but she was unable to recall anything connected with it.

"She is Mrs. Cass's niece. Do you remember Mrs. Cass, who lived near us last summer?"

"Mrs. Cass? I remember. Her niece?" With the slow sentences something—a hope or an expectancy—died out of her face.

Tall, well-formed, "fine-looking" man, people called Bradley Holland. His face wore the easy self-confidence and the complacency of one who had prospered and who felt a good-natured liking for a world that had treated him well and furthered his projects. Some pain or disappointment he dimly read in the countenance before him, and with a kindness that bore just a perceptible trace of the condescension of strength to weakness he endeavored to reassure his mother:

"Do not think that such a change in my life will bring any change to you, mother, unless it is to make you more comfortable. You know I would gladly do that."

"I know; you have always been kind to me, Bradley. I was not thinking of myself."

"And I will tell you more about it—all about it—whenever you choose; to-night, perhaps. Will that do?"

"That will do, thank you."

Mrs. Holland had no desire to talk longer; her eager interest, whatever its exciting cause, had vanished in that brief interview. She passed on up

the handsome stairway, through the wide hall with its rich carpeting and its gleams of marble, and entered a room that was in marked contrast with those she had left. A plain ingrain carpet, a simple bedstead, bureau and dressing-table, a few chairs —easy and pretty, but inexpensive—a capacious home-cushioned rocker drawn up before the fire and a little work-table near it, an old-fashioned sofa that looked as if it might have been worn shiny by children's clambering feet, and back in a corner a little crib of ancient style,— these, with a few old pictures, made up the furnishing, homelike and comfortable enough, but strangely out of keeping with the rest of the house. In a sunny window a few plants were blooming—geraniums, pinks and a monthly rose. A basket on the work-table held skeins of colored worsted and some plain sewing. The old woman stood still for a moment and looked around on it all with trembling lips. Then, with a swift motion, she crossed the room, and, falling down on her knees beside the little crib, hid her face against it with a sudden burst of tears and a bitter cry:

"How long, O Lord, how long?"

CHAPTER IV.

KITTY.

MISS MARIA, standing before her toilet-table, was slowly unclasping bracelet and pin and laying aside the ruby ornaments that had brightened her rich black dress. The somewhat swarthy face that looked at her from the mirror was no longer youthful, but Maria complacently noted that the black eyes were bright, that the bands of jetty hair were unmarked by gray and that the rubies were remarkably becoming. She certainly looked young for her years, and she congratulated herself, as she had often done before, upon having sufficient taste to dress becomingly and sufficient sense always to take life comfortably and to avoid the worrying that is sure to bring lines and wrinkles.

"So many women wear themselves out with their anxiety and worrying! It would be much better if they would take care of themselves and leave others to do the same," said

Miss Maria, philosophically. She had always given her first and best care to herself.

A light tap at the door was followed by the entrance of Kitty:

"May I come in, Cousin Maria? There is no one down stairs and no probability of callers this stormy evening, and I am too stupid to enjoy my own society. I thought you would be comfortably arrayed in wrapper and slippers by this time."

"I shall be presently." Miss Maria deliberately arranged the rubies in their velvet case and closed it with a snap. "I never rush around in your fashion. 'Take things calmly' is my motto, you know."

Kitty had reason to know. The maxim and its observance had exasperated her often, and she foresaw that it might do so again before this interview was over. She had brought her embroidery, but it was merely a pretext. She had not dropped in from any passing mood of loneliness or sociability, but had carefully chosen the time and the place for a quiet talk. All this Miss Maria understood quite well—perhaps even better than did Kitty herself. She had expected her coming, though she intimated nothing of the kind.

It was a peculiarity of the intercourse between

these two that they never openly and avowedly consulted each other or discussed in frank confidence their plans and their wishes. On Miss Maria's part this had been the result of design, the carrying out of her purpose to avoid all worry. The position of adviser and confidante, especially to a young girl, meant responsibility and might bring obligations and embarrassments. She liked Kitty well enough. She had been perfectly willing to take the oversight of her wardrobe so long as the girl was too young to do it herself, and to look after her in a general way, as she did after the rest of the household, but she had no intention of assuming any relation of motherly or sisterly guardianship; she had carefully kept herself free from all that. She had found Kitty in the family when she came there. The distant relative who had left three or four hundred dollars for the child's education had bequeathed it in trust to Mrs. Bradley Holland, and, with her young cousin's existence in this way brought to her notice, the lady had sent for her, urging the superior advantages that could thus be afforded. Mrs. Holland had promptly decided that the legacy would not more than suffice for the girl's wardrobe while she remained, and so had taken all other expenses upon herself. Three years later Mrs. Holland died; and

when Miss Maria came to act as mistress of the place, she found that the presence of the little girl helped to brighten the otherwise lonely household, and was glad to have her stay. Colonel Holland did not see any reason why the plan for Kitty's education should be changed if Cousin Maria was willing to take charge of her, and so Kitty remained; indeed, she was then too young to have thought of doing otherwise unless it had been suggested to her.

So, in pursuance of Miss Maria's purpose, Kitty learned to sob her grief out by herself, to confide her wishes to a little gilt-edged diary and to get along without asking much advice. She learned to understand when Miss Maria was talking *at* her, to pick up what was intended for her information, censure or misleading, as the case might be, and to turn it to such account as she could, without expecting Miss Maria to say it directly to her. Naturally, she soon adopted the same seemingly unintentional way of giving any intelligence she herself wished to bestow upon that lady, and planned circuitous ways of eliciting any information she desired. Their conversation on any but the most ordinary topics resembled a game of chess—an apparently careless playing, yet with a keen eye watching the

moves of the enemy and a fixed determination of drawing him out. Not that these two were in any sense enemies: Kitty could not have explained, if she had tried, why they should assume such an attitude; but Miss Maria, furtively noting the girl's changing face that evening, again congratulated herself on the wise course that had saved her from any entanglements of responsibility or obligation. Now, as things had turned out, it was comfortable to be entirely free.

Kitty settled herself in a low rocker, snipped a thread of embroidery silk and remarked upon the weather—wondered whether the rain would not soon change to snow: it surely must be time for snow. She thought it must have been a dreary day for that Upton wedding. Then, apropos of weddings, she observed with a careless little laugh, holding her embroidery off to view the shading of a rose-leaf,

"And so Cousin Bradley is really going to marry again?"

"Really, at last." Miss Maria smoothed out the bows on her wrapper. "You did not meet Miss Barbara last year, I believe?"

"No." Kitty was sure that Miss Maria remembered all about it, and she could scarcely hide her

impatience in her reply. "I heard of her, of course, but I made no effort to meet her. I did not dream then that it would ever be a matter of any consequence whether I liked her or not."

"I don't suppose it really is a matter of very great consequence what either of us think of her," smiled Miss Maria, blandly. "The important point is that Cousin Bradley is satisfied."

Kitty smoothed out her work, took two or three stitches and schooled her voice into indifferent carelessness before she said reflectively,

"Yes? Still, if you expected to stay here, it would make considerable difference what you thought of her yourself."

"Certainly, though that is a very improbable supposition, for I shall go home, of course. You will do the same, I suppose? Fortunately, we both have homes," Miss Maria concluded, with her easy laugh.

Kitty thought of the little village, the old "Barracks" and the quiet life there, and the next few stitches pricked her fingers, though she answered, without looking up, that she had not thought much about it.

"No, I suppose not; it is one of those things that decide themselves without allowing much

room for thought," agreed Miss Maria, decidedly. "With your education completed and a stranger coming here as mistress, you could not be content to stay, a mere dependant without even a shadow of relationship. No, of course you could not think of such a thing? I did not mean to suggest that, my dear. I beg your pardon if my question sounded like it," she concluded, apologetically.

Miss Maria had said just what she wanted to say—had opened Kitty's eyes to the impropriety of remaining where she was and had plainly intimated that she must go home—without having burdened herself with the necessity of considering difficulties or of giving advice in regard to the future. She, Miss Maria, had no fortune at her command. She could not herself expect to live so handsomely as she had done at Cousin Bradley's, and she could afford no *protegée*, she said to herself, with a little shrug of her shoulders as she remembered her brief visit at the Wilders' and bethought her that there might be hard times for Kitty.

As for Kitty, she took particular pains with the shading of a spray, discarding two or three tints of green before she found one that suited her: it

for a minute spared her the necessity of speaking. She felt as if her hands had been suddenly wrenched from their hold and herself pushed out into deep water. The truth was, she had not thought of going home—or, rather, that she had so long considered the Holland place her home that she had almost ceased to think of any other. Anomalous as was her position in the family, she had bestowed very little concern upon it. When she first came, she had been too much of a child to trouble herself about the arrangements that were made or to understand very clearly the intentions in regard to her. She was to "live with Cousin Helen and be educated," and she should see a great many fine things and have a nice time: that was the sum and substance of the plan as it appeared to her and as she presented it to rebellious Petra and Dick. She had easily adapted herself to her luxurious surroundings: such things suited her. In all the years she had made but two or three visits home, and they were brief ones. She did not care to stay; the old place and the old life no longer seemed homelike, and she was glad to get back to more familiar pleasures and associations. There was no one to talk to her of the future or of a life different from the one she was leading,

and she made no plans for it. Her school-life went on, and the bills were paid without thought, often without knowledge, of hers. She enjoyed all the benefits of wealth and the standing it gave her among her companions, and was too familiar with it all to consider the grounds on which it was accorded. After she had been graduated—ranking fairly well in studies and high in graduation dress: the latter was a great point in the fashionable seminary which bestowed upon her its diploma—it had occurred to her in a serious hour to consult Cousin Bradley and learn where she stood, but he had treated her inquiries lightly and had given her very little information.

"Really, Kitty, I don't know just exactly how our account does stand; you see, it is such a weighty affair that I haven't looked it up lately," he laughed. "It doesn't matter, so long as you have what you want, does it? What is it now? Allowance given out, eh?"

"No, sir, but I thought there were only a few hundred dollars left for my education."

"Exactly; four hundred dollars was the amount, I believe. You don't think I have been speculating with your funds, defrauding you, or anything of that kind, do you, Kitty?"

"Oh no!"

Kitty laughed and flushed. It was not quite easy to talk to Cousin Bradley, for, notwithstanding the years she had spent in his family, she did not feel very well acquainted with him. He was not a man who had much home-life; he knew very little of what the members of his household were doing, and they had still less knowledge of all the outside interests and ties that made up the greater part of his existence. When he was at home and not too much engrossed to talk, he was always pleasant; but his light badinage often perplexed Kitty, and as effectively barred any questions she might have asked as moroseness or sternness would have done.

"But, Cousin Bradley," she persisted, after a moment's thought, "if there was no more than that —four hundred dollars—it wouldn't have lasted until now; I must have used it up long ago."

"Possibly, unless it was very elastic, as some sums are. On the whole, I think yours must have been of that kind, and that it has stretched." Then he added more gravely, "Your cousin Helen intended to educate you, Kitty. I don't really know what her plans were, but I presume Maria has carried them out as well as any one could do."

"But I am through school now?" suggested Kitty, questioningly.

"Are you?" absently, as if his wife's name had sent his thoughts wandering in another direction. "Oh yes; I had forgotten that important blue-ribboned document. Well, you are taking music-lessons or something of that sort?"

"Yes, sir—music and drawing."

"They are a part of your education, I suppose? Go on with your music and don't bother, Kitty; it is all right so long as you are contented."

Kitty had found it easy to take Mr. Holland's advice. A little money more or less did not seem a thing to worry over in that house, and her education had not been of a sort to give her any true appreciation of its value. Indeed, she had sought the interview with no clearly defined purpose beyond that of learning what she was expected to do next, and, as nothing seemed to be expected of her, it had been very easy to settle down and enjoy the daily life as it came.

But now Miss Maria's few sentences had placed the changed conditions sharply before Kitty. She was no adopted daughter of the family—"not a servant, nor yet a child." The inducement offered for coming had been generously fulfilled, and even

if she were asked to remain she ought to have sufficient self-respect to prevent her becoming a mere hanger-on and dependant where she had no claim, and where it was scarcely probable her presence could longer be desired. That was exactly the meaning—none too delicately expressed—of the words spoken so composedly while Miss Maria was smoothing out ribbons and fastening loops.

The girl's face burned with shame at not having seen all this for herself, and with indignation at Miss Maria for daring to remind her of it, and for the careless selfishness which, now that their ways were to part, bestowed no further interest upon hers. But the humiliation and the resentment were only surface emotions; beneath them were dismay and sinking of heart.

As the days passed and changes began in the house—new carpets and hangings and the remodeling of rooms—Kitty became convinced that, however it had wounded her, the prediction that she would not be urged to remain was correct. When she spoke to Colonel Holland of going home, he playfully questioned her "sudden desire to run away," assured her that the house was large enough to hold several more people and declared that no ogre was coming "to eat up nice little girls," but

he did not seriously combat her purpose. In justice it must be said that he did not fully realize the situation. He had never thought of Kitty as a permanent member of his family—had never thought much about the matter in any way, indeed. He knew very little of her home or her family. She was a young relative whom his wife had chosen to assist; that was all he cared to know. Niggardliness was no part of his character, and he believed in allowing the women-folk of his household undisputed sway in their own dominions. After his wife's death he had generously carried out her purpose so far as he understood it. With the new wife's coming would begin a new *régime*, and it seemed to him quite as natural that Kitty should decide to go home as that Maria should wish to go. He had a comfortable consciousness of having dealt handsomely by both of them. Apparently, it had never occurred to him or to any one else to ask for what Kitty's education was qualifying her. It certainly had not fitted her for self-help nor to go contentedly back to her old home.

Laurence was the companion that best suited Kitty in those days. He did not want her to go away, grumbled not a little over the impending changes and confided to her his secret doubts

about liking a new mother, though, to be sure, he supposed he should be at school a great deal and off to college in a few years, and he thought it would be nice to go out to Kitty's place in the summer and fish. This latter prospect soon so thoroughly consoled him as to make the whole outlook rather attractive.

In her loneliness and longing for sympathy Kitty did what otherwise she would never have dreamed of doing—told her trouble to Grandma Holland. She might have known better. The old lady pushed back the bright hair and looked kindly into the troubled eyes, but only said,

"I shall miss your face and voice about the house, Kitty, but I am not sorry to have you go away from here."

"Of course I love my own folks—I don't mean that I don't," explained Kitty—"but everything is so different there."

"It may be the best difference in the world for you," persisted the old lady. "It is your own home; and if it *is* plain, that need not hinder you from having plenty of love in it. And if there is not much money, be sure that what you have is clean money, such as the blessing of the Lord will rest upon, and you can be happy.

Wealth isn't everything; never make the mistake of thinking it is. The happiest years of my life were spent in a plain country home where I looked after my own work and could ask God to bless us in basket and in store. No other carpet has ever looked so pretty to me as one that John and I planned and saved a whole winter to buy. How the children danced over it the night it was put down! I can see the old room just as it looked that night." The dim eyes filled with tears, and the old lady added earnestly, "Yes, those were the happy days of my life, before the devil offered us the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them."

Of course grandma was running off into one of her "queer spells" when she talked like that, and Kitty dropped the conversation.

There was nothing left for Kitty but to send home word of her coming, and so was written the letter which was handed to Dick when one evening he stopped at the village post-office.

CHAPTER V.

BARBARA'S OUTLOOK.

"ARE the shutters in your room closed, Barbara?"

Barbara Graham laughed at the question, which it seemed to her Aunt Cass had asked every winter night since she could remember—laughed because she remembered how often this cautious watchfulness over every household trifle had irritated her. She went to the window, but lingered there a moment to look upon the sky and read its promise for the morrow.

"Starry, cold and clear: it will be a fair day—to-morrow."

Barbara said the words softly to herself with a lingering emphasis on the last one. Then, with a little shiver as the keen night air swept in, she closed shutters and sash, and, dropping the curtains, went back to the fire. It was a very carefully constructed and well-behaved fire—just so many lumps of coal properly arranged in the tiny

grate—and with prudent treatment warranted to last a certain length of time. From force of long habit Barbara stirred it cautiously, contriving to brighten the blaze a little without causing the mass to topple over or to burn too fiercely. She drew a low seat near it and sat down where the ruddy glow fell around her. "Barbara's face always lights up well," her aunt was wont to say, speaking of it as she did of certain colors in the pretentious parlors down stairs; and just now her bowed head with its crown of dark hair, the brown eyes full of dreamy light and the thoughtful changing face made a pretty picture. She had carefully drawn her dress aside—that was force of habit also, the result of many admonitions—to save it from the heat of the fire, but as she did so her eye caught the flash of a diamond on her hand, and with a swift movement she shook the silken drapery back into place and laughed again.

"No, you needn't do that any more, Barbara Graham. The need of such petty economies is over; for the rest of your life you will not have to spend what little brain-power you possess in studying how to get clothes that you cannot afford, and how to keep them in an impossible state of

preservation afterward," she said, straightening the slender band on her finger and looking down half exultantly, half wonderingly at the stone that glittered in the light like a great drop of dew. It seemed to her an open door of escape from many things she hated, but it was strange that such a little thing could possess such magic. Sitting there alone in her own room, she could scarcely realize that the old life was so nearly over. How fiercely she sometimes hated it all! And yet there had been shelter, home and care always. Aunt Cass had tried to do her best as she saw it, and doubtless many girls of Barbara's acquaintance had considered her lot an enviable one. She had been educated at a fashionable seminary and lived in a large house in an eminently "respectable" neighborhood, but all her girlhood had been hampered and fretted by the ceaseless struggle to live as people of any consequence expected to live, as Aunt Cass phrased it. To make a slender income do the work of a handsome one and to exhibit to the world the same results was the chief aim of that lady's life, and it was a task whose accomplishment called for skillful manœuvring and untiring vigilance. Pinching and scrimping in private were necessary in order to make a display in public. The gas must be kept

low, the fires scant and the servants poorly paid in order to meet the expense of giving a grand party occasionally and of going yearly to the mountains or the sea-side, where they could see and be seen. Dresses must possess the elegance and elaborateness of the stylish dressmaker, but to lessen her exorbitant bills a cheap seamstress must be hired to do the finishing, and to work under the supervision and with the aid of the ladies themselves. How often Barbara had pitied the poor pale creature, and herself as well, in the dreary days when they stitched from morning till night in some back room, while the front of the house was closed and the family were popularly supposed to be out of town! It was a frequent complaint of Aunt Cass's that Barbara did not properly appreciate the efforts and sacrifices made in her behalf—the endeavor to have her "get on in the world;" and possibly she did not. She certainly grew very tired of the parlors shut up excepting on state occasions, of a table whose linen and silver might feast the eyes, but which was so meagrely provided for any other sort of feasting that even in her school-days the inviting of a friend to dinner or to supper was rarely permitted. She had often wished for more comfort and less show, and had impatiently declared that she would be glad to

change for a plainer life if only it could be "real, clear through." Still, she did enjoy the occasions when the closed rooms blossomed into light, warmth and beauty, when the house was filled with guests, and when all the delicacies of the season were served with a profusion and taste that brought Aunt Cass many compliments on her "delightful evenings." And Barbara liked the pretty dresses, though she fretted over the trouble and contriving necessary to obtain them. It was impossible that, trained as she had been to consider wealth and station of superior importance, she should not desire to attain them, and, though she had more than once been humiliated and angered by her aunt's evident anxiety to thrust her into notice and to attract to her the attention of some who had wealth—and not much else—to recommend them, yet she was elated and happy over the consummation marked by the ring. Aunt Cass had called the engagement "unexceptionable—the most fortunate thing that could have happened, my dear;" and she had been so beaming and gracious that Barbara had the novel sensation of having for once met her aunt's expectation and given perfect satisfaction.

"Poor Aunt Cass! I suppose she has meant to do the best she could for me, though our ideas of

the best haven't always been harmonious," murmured the girl, softening, as a generous heart will, toward the past she was leaving.

But the eyes bent upon the sparkling stone presently grew graver and the face more deeply thoughtful. For, after all, this change before her was not only an escape from old annoyances, but an entrance upon— What? Colonel Holland was so much older than herself, so wealthy and influential, that his preference had surprised and flattered her. She felt for him an admiration still tinged with shyness, and she had scarcely remembered that the giving was not all on his side; for, though Aunt Cass had sometimes querulously asserted that Barbara thought nothing good enough for her, an overestimate of herself and of her deserts was not one of the girl's faults. In their interview concerning the future she had asked but few questions—had cared to ask but few—and had trustfully taken much for granted. Colonel Holland had told her of his house, but she knew very little of it beyond its outward appearance. There were some relatives who were going away—she did not bestow much thought upon them—and a son, a half-grown boy, who probably would soon be away at school. It had not occurred to her that she could have any responsibility in

his direction; it only seemed strange to think of herself as in any way connected with him: boys were an unknown quantity in Aunt Cass's small household. But there was Colonel Holland's mother. Barbara knew what common report said of her, and she thought she understood when the colonel spoke of her as one of the best of mothers, but growing old now, somewhat broken in health, and—peculiar. He supposed old people were apt to have their whims and their fancies, though his mother had rather more of them than most people, perhaps, and of a different sort. They could only let her have her own way in such matters and make her as comfortable as possible. And Barbara would not mind even though some things might be annoying, but would help to make the best of it for his sake? Barbara had not thought it a hard promise to give. Having heard so much from others, she was delicately guarded in her inquiries and did not talk much upon the subject, but she secretly resolved to be very kind to the poor mother and possibly—who knew?—she might make her so happy as to win her back to reason again. And, as for bearing annoyances, Colonel Holland little knew what drill she had known in that line.

"Barbara! Not ready for bed yet?" said her

aunt, looking in at the door. "What are you dreaming over the fire for at this hour?"

"Meditating," answered Barbara, with a smile.

"You'd much better be sleeping if you want to be fresh for to-morrow."

Then Mrs. Cass glanced at the gas-jet and remarked upon its brilliancy.

"You certainly have extravagant tastes, my dear," she said, with a complacent laugh, and went away leaving the girl to follow her own pleasure.

A little while before Mrs. Cass would have summarily ordered Barbara to bed, would have lowered that light the minute she espied it, and would have sharply rebuked the wastefulness that had permitted it to burn at such a rate; but already there had crept into Aunt Cass's manner a deference for the future Mrs. Holland which amazed and amused Barbara, who laughed softly as the door closed:

"Poor Aunt Cass! She has had such hard work to keep up the semblance of wealth that any one who possesses the genuine article moves her to absolute veneration. I am glad I shall not have to keep up appearances any more; I can appear what I am. I am so sick of shams and pretences! I I mean to be real all the rest of my life." Then, as if her half-impatient words had suggested a

deeper thought, her face grew gentle and more grave, and she added wistfully, "I believe I'd like to be good."

The expression and the desire were vague enough. Barbara did not very clearly know what she meant or wanted; it was only the awakening hunger of a soul tired of husks. All her life she had gone to church in much the same way that she went to concerts, fine lectures, and other places where people in good society were expected to go. It was the proper thing to do when they were not away from home and when the weather was pleasant. She had been instructed also in the etiquette of the place and the hour. Aunt Cass was a punctilious observer of propriety, and her niece had been taught to sit decorously in the pew, to find the page in the hymn-book and to bow her head in prayer because well-bred people did so. For the rest, Lent was a season for running in for repairs, Easter was the Epiphany of new clothes, and the other fasts and festivals were of about equal significance. She heard the gospel message, indeed, but the life that preceded and followed that one hour in the week was not of a sort to leave much room for any serious impression. Every church has its outer circle —a mere fringe on its garments—of people whose

only connection with it is their attendance once each week at the public service; beyond that they pay no heed to its meetings, bear no share of its burdens and are utterly ignorant of its various branches of work. Mrs. Cass was one of these, and, though she would have been shocked by the comparison, she arranged her weekly visit to the sanctuary much as she would have arranged a visit to a fever-hospital—by a previous course of treatment likely to render her impervious to all influences she might encounter—and followed by a regimen calculated to eradicate any germs that might else have developed.

Still, all preventives occasionally fail, and Barbara's faint wish was fanned into stronger life by one of those little incidents that we call chance. Down the quiet street came a party of belated students from some society meeting or lecture. One of them began to whistle; the others joined, and presently the tune broke into words, sweetly distinct on the night air as they passed beneath the window:

"In every high and stormy gale
My anchor holds within the veil;
On Christ, the solid Rock, I stand:
All other ground is sinking sand."

Barbara listened until the refrain died away in the distance. The words recalled the face of Jeanette Grey, a seamstress who occasionally worked for her. Often in those long tiresome days of sewing that Barbara so hated, Jeanette—almost unconsciously, it seemed—would begin to sing. Her pale, quiet face, her low, pleasing voice and those sweet hymns—always hymns—were a mystery to Barbara. If often she found life unsatisfactory, what must it be to Jeanette, with her bare little home, her far from vigorous health and her ceaseless round of sewing for other people? One day Barbara questioned half wonderingly, half impatiently.

"Do you really believe all that, Jeanette? I mean," she explained, as Jeanette looked up in surprise, "that I suppose people write all those things to be sung in churches and such places and because they think it would be right to feel that way, but that if any real trouble came to them they would only feel dreadfully, like any one else, and never think of such things at all."

"But many of them were written by people in sorrow—people who would never have known how to write them but for that," urged Jeanette, in earnest dissent. "And I have known trouble,

Miss Barbara. When my father died, and mother—" Her voice broke. "Oh, I couldn't have borne it—I couldn't bear it now—but for believing just these things. The anchor holds within the veil. It does hold!" The last words were spoken more to herself than to her companion, an assurance on which her very soul was resting. So much Barbara comprehended, though the language was somewhat obscure to her, and the light that flashed over the pale, worn face was more incomprehensible still.

But, though Barbara asked no further questions, she often watched the quiet, gentle girl with a wonder that held in it not a little of respect, and from that time there had grown up a tacit understanding, a mutual liking, which had made Jeanette's days of work in the house much pleasanter and Barbara's hours of sewing less irksome than they had been.

The memory of that talk came back with the words of the singers in the street, and the thought of Jeanette suddenly reminded Barbara of a little packet that had been handed her in the morning. A poorly-dressed boy had brought it, and in the hurry of the hour it had been laid aside and afterward forgotten. Costly gifts and pretentious pack-

ages were arriving in such numbers that it was not strange one so small should have been overlooked, but now it occurred to her that Jeanette might have sent it. Tiptoeing across the hall that Aunt Cass might not be disturbed, she secured the tiny bundle and returned. Yes, it was from Jeanette—just a plain handkerchief, soft and fine and finished with Jeanette's own exquisite hemstitching. With it was a note—a few words of thanks for kindness in the past with sincere wishes for Barbara's happiness in the future, and then a reference to that unforgotten conversation. She "had often wished to speak of the subject again, but had feared that she might be considered obtrusive or presumptuous. She was sorry she had been so cowardly and selfish; for was it not selfish to keep back good tidings through fear that one's motives might be misunderstood? But, now that Barbara was going away, she could only entreat her to try for herself this 'hope which is as an anchor to the soul, sure and steadfast.'" It was very simple. Jeanette was not a ready writer, and after she had labored long over her little note it seemed to her stiff and meagre, but none of the elegantly worded congratulations on creamy cards had touched Barbara as did these earnest lines traced so painstakingly on the thin note paper.

"How queer that it should have come just now, when that song had made me think of her!" she said.

Barbara dropped the paper in her lap and looked long and soberly into the fire, until the chiming of the clock that seemed strangely loud in the still house, aroused her.

Midnight! Aunt Cass would be horrified. Barbara placed the handkerchief where it would be ready for use on the morrow—she would have that, and no other—and slowly prepared for bed; but when she knelt to repeat the form of prayer she had used since childhood—usually it had been only a form—she added,

"Let me find the anchor that will hold in storms."

Yet it seemed to Barbara, as she laid her head upon its pillow that night, that storms and rough waters for her were nearly over, and that the life upon which she was entering was a smooth and happy haven.

CHAPTER VI.

HOME.

"KITTY is coming home," said Dick, meeting his sister at the gate one evening and holding up a letter he had just brought from the office —"coming home to stay."

Pete was tired with her day's work and the long walk home, and she sought the first available seat —which chanced to be the stairs in the hall—before she drew the missive from its envelope. There, with her hat pushed hastily back, her lunch-basket dropped on the step beside her, she read the words Kitty had so disconsolately penned:

"Colonel Holland is going to marry again, and of course it wouldn't be pleasant for Kitty to stay," said Pete, slowly, looking up at Dick, who had followed her into the house and stood watching her while she read.

"Well, she don't need to stay. She has finished her education, and that was what she went for; so I don't see why she'd want to stay any longer, any

way," answered Dick. "She says she has no home to go to but this. Of course she hasn't; none of us have."

So it happened that the pensive and martyr-like tone of the letter was unnoticed, and the combination of circumstances which Kitty deemed such an adverse and unexpected fate appeared the most natural thing in the world to the dwellers in the old homestead. Colonel Holland's marriage and plans were matters of minor interest to them; after the first explanation they soon ceased to remember them even as the cause of Kitty's return. That she was coming home was the one important fact. The old sisterly feeling, so long dormant, awoke in Pete's heart. She had sorely missed her grandmother, but Kitty's presence would lighten the loneliness, and there were so many things in which her advice and help would be a comfort. Even the grandfather aroused to an interest and eagerness that was strangely unlike him now:

"Kitty coming home to live? Well, I'm glad of that. She'll brighten up the old house and be lots of company for us—for me. She always used to trot around after me—into the garden, out to the barn or off to the field. Always wanted to help grandpa, little Kitty did. Yes, I'll be glad to have



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her home. Nobody else has much time to spare for an old man, but she will not leave him alone—my little Kitty will not."

If a momentary pang of jealousy, a throb of wounded feeling, reminded Pete that her own daily absences were not a matter of choice, and that her sister had with no apparent compunction left him alone for years, she did not put the thought into words. It vanished in a moment, and, indeed, she had scarcely reflected that it was not Kitty's own free will that was bringing her back at last. Pete wanted to make everything pleasant and home-like for the returning one, and that was a subject that called for study.

"We must plan about a room for Kitty," she said to Dick in one of their evening talks.

"Why, there are rooms enough," answered Dick, with boyish obtuseness. "The one thing the old Barracks doesn't lack is plenty of rooms."

"Oh, it isn't just a place; it's what to put in it. You see, Dick," hesitatingly, "she is used to everything nice. I suppose we can hardly think how grand everything is in a house like Colonel Holland's."

"But it isn't hers—never was," said Dick, sagely. "This is her home."

"I know; that is why we want to make it pleasant. She has been away so long, been where things are so different, that she will notice what you and I wouldn't."

"I wish we had some money to fix up with," said Dick, doubtfully. Then his face brightened with a sudden thought: "I say, Pete! you might take that old bureau out of my room. I ain't particular about my clothes: they can hang up anywhere; and if we varnish that up—I can get some varnish—and rub up the brass rings, it'll look splendid."

Pete laughed at the idea of splendor as connected with the antiquated chest of drawers, a relic of her grandmother's early days, but there was a look in Dick's bright, brave, homely face which made her feel that, after all, Kitty had something well worth coming home to.

The family resources were certainly in a reduced condition; nevertheless, Pete reviewed them patiently, pinching a little here, scraping something there, that she might make a few purchases. She had selected a sunny front chamber, one of the pleasantest in the house, for Kitty's room, and during many an hour at the factory, while her swift hands folded papers and pamphlets, her brain was busy

with plans of furnishing. She had very little money to expend ; that fact made thought and labor only the more necessary, and these she gave freely. The days were not her own, but in the evenings she ripped and turned the old carpet and tacked up the fresh curtains which, plain and cheap as they were, represented an outlay that had been hard to manage. Dick brought the promised varnish, and some paint as well, and "shined everything up," as he complacently declared. His admiration, when the apartment was at last in readiness, was sincere and enthusiastic.

"Looks pretty enough for anybody, now, don't it, Pete?"

The grandfather also scanned the room with pleased eyes, and, going on one of his rare excursions to the village, he returned with a cheap print in a much decorated frame.

"There! Hang that up; that'll finish off the room," he said, triumphantly. "Kitty always liked pictures, and folks like Colonel Holland have lots of such things."

"But, grandpa," exclaimed Pete, in dismay, "you have spent the money that was to have bought your new overshoes, and you needed them so badly."

"Never mind," said the old man, smiling down at his worn boots and rubbing his hands together in childish pleasure over his purchase. "I don't get out much in bad weather, anyhow, and I will not care about going when Kitty's here. She mustn't miss things she's used to."

So many articles that money would have bought if it was to be diverted from its original object! But it was useless to think of that now, and Pete hung the picture in silence.

Down stairs old Deb shook her head doubtfully and muttered to herself:

"Jes' like dem folks 'way off 'mong de heathens —flingin' down dere po' treasures for de Jugernot ter roll ober 'em! An' what's crush under de wheels is nuff sight mo' precious dan de dress-up image dat's 'bove de wheels." But she said it only to herself.

It was just at twilight of a cloudy day that Kitty stepped from the train to the platform of the little station, the only passenger for the village. Inside the cars the lamps were already lighted; outside a cold gray sky bent over the snowy earth. The place looked dreary, the small station more shabby and ill-kept than she had ever before noticed it to be. The girl felt like crying out after

the swiftly receding lights. All her fellow-passengers were going somewhere; she only was dropped in this out-of-the-world nook.

"Here you are!" cried a hearty voice, and Dick rushed up breathlessly. "I had an errand to Squire Gwynn that kept me a little late, and then, when I heard the whistle, I ran a race with the cars. Glad you're home again, Kitty."

"I am glad that somebody is glad," said Kitty, with a faint smile and an effort to say something truthful that would not sound unkind.

Dick had no thought of analyzing Kitty's remark; he was only anxious to get her and her belongings safely home, where Pete could help take care of her. She was only Kitty, to be sure, but there was that about her dress and her manner that suddenly reminded him of the patch on his heavy boots, and that his coat-sleeves were too short and his hands a pair of awkward appendages that he did not know exactly where to bestow. He did not care for frippery, he assured himself, and grew a trifle more brusque and angular than usual to show his superiority to anything of the kind. Then he remembered again that this was just Kitty, and comforted himself with the reflection that she would "not seem so much like company

in a few days." Dick detested what he called "company."

"How awkward and homely the boy has grown!" Kitty thought as she followed him.

It was a hard evening despite the grandfather's delight in Kitty's return, Pete's welcome and old Deb's extra exertions in the culinary line. Kitty could not eat. The barrenness and the plainness of everything about the house had not struck her so forcibly when she came on her rare visits—perhaps because she did not think of herself as connected with it then—and the place was surely more poverty-stricken than in the old days. She had known, of course, that all remittances from abroad ceased with her father's death, but it had made no difference to her at Colonel Holland's, and she had not thought how it must affect those at home. How could she endure such a life?

"We're glad to have you come home again, little girl," said her grandfather, aroused to unusual talkativeness while she made a pretence of sipping her tea. "Seems like the old times back again—if your grandma was here."

Kitty noticed that it was "a horrid red silk handkerchief" that wiped the dim old eyes—noticed that more than the tears or the trembling

voice. She excused herself on the plea of being tired, and escaped to her own room as early as possible.

"Well, wasn't she surprised?" asked Dick, who had eagerly awaited Petra's return for a description of the pleasure that carefully prepared room had afforded. "Didn't she think it was nice?"

"She didn't say," answered Pete, slowly; "she was so tired, you know."

But Kitty, the moment she was left alone, had surveyed the apartment with a pity for herself that deepened with every detail of her surroundings. The new picture on the wall added the last straw to the intolerable burden of disgust.

"Cheap, tawdry thing! The old paper was ugly enough without adding that horror," she said; and, throwing herself on the bed, she buried her face in the pillow with a passionate burst of tears. She did not expect to sleep that night. Indeed, she wrote in her journal—a large gilt-edged, tinted-leaved volume with a tiny lock and key—"I am far too wretched to seek repose; I can only keep vigil with my own sad thoughts." But she had promised to send weekly voluminous extracts from that journal to her intimate friend, Angie Bates, and one who expects to relate her experiences will

be quite certain, even though unconsciously, to shape her experiences with a view to relating them. The vigil, however, was an exceedingly short one. The downy bed and the fresh sheets, with their faint odor of lavender from Grandma Wilder's old linen-press, were not conducive to wretchedness, and Kitty remembered hers no more until the sun was shining in at her windows the next morning.

It was Deb's voice at the door, and not the sunlight, that awakened the sleeper:

"Don' yer wanter hab yer breakfus now, Miss Kitty? Miss Pete she done gone long ago. 'Pears like yer grandpa be mighty glad ter see yer."

To the early breakfast of the family Petra had not allowed Kitty to be summoned. She was tired that morning; they would let her rest, she said to her grandfather and to Deb, impatient for different reasons. Even to herself she did not acknowledge the undefined feeling that the day would begin more comfortably if Kitty did not see her work-dress, her lunch-basket and the always somewhat hurried and forlorn meal by lamplight.

So, when Kitty had made her leisurely toilet and descended to the kitchen, she met only her grandfather and Deb. The latter, obeying Petra's parting request, had brought forth the few remaining

pieces of china—a rare old cup and plate—and had arranged her muffins and coffee as temptingly as possible on a white-draped table by the window.

The old man, sitting before the fire, looked up eagerly as Kitty entered:

"Here she comes—little Kitty! Slept good in that nice room, didn't you? You look pretty as a pink this morning."

The delicate cashmere wrapper suited well Kitty's fair face, however unsuitable it might be to her surroundings. But a pink could scarcely have manifested less appreciation of the admiration it evoked than did Kitty; she was thinking of the breakfast-room at Cousin Bradley's, and did not heed the remark. Then, too, she had an injured feeling that Pete might at least have stayed at home for one day, and not have left her entirely to the company of these two:

"We have got a nice lot of chickens now—Leghorns and Cochins. Remember how you used to like to help me feed the chickens, Kitty?" said her grandfather, moving his chair a little nearer the table. "I haven't been out to feed 'em yet this morning," he added, suggestively.

But Kitty was indifferent to the beauties of the feathered tribe and utterly averse to renewing an

acquaintance with the poultry-yard; she would not understand the invitation:

"Have you? I'm afraid I'm no judge of such things now, grandpa. I was only a little girl then, and liked to race about anywhere. Grandma ought to have kept me in more."

A flash of pain crossed the worn old face and there was a touch of sternness in the simple words:

"Your grandma was mighty good to you, Kitty."

"So she was—always. I didn't mean anything else," answered Kitty, with a burst of remorseful tenderness as she recalled the loving face that had made the sunlight of her childhood. "She was only too good to me, and so were you, grandpa."

The tears in the blue eyes instantly softened the old man.

"To be sure you didn't mean anything else, child; grandpa knows that. And you was a comfort to us both, Kitty, from the time your father first brought you up to the old farm in Kannuck county. The house was sort of lonesome with just us two, and 'twas good to have a little child in it once more."

Kitty talked with her grandfather for a little

while of the old times—or, rather, listened while he talked—and even went up stairs with him to look at a few books that had been "Richard's, poor boy!" At the door of her room he could not resist the temptation of pausing to ask,

"That new picture sort of makes the room look home-like, don't it, Kitty? Sort of nice, eh?"

"Oh, grandpa! That?" Kitty made a little grimace. "What did possess Pete to get it?"

"I—I thought it was pretty nice," he faltered. He had wanted to tell her that it was his thought for her, but the words refused to come. "I don't s'pose I know about such things," he added, humbly; and then he suddenly remembered that the chickens were still awaiting their breakfast, and silently led the way down stairs. Somehow, the winter day was not so bright as he had thought it earlier. He shivered as his steps crossed the yard: the old boots were badly worn, after all.

Kitty was glad to be left alone. She comforted herself with the reflection that she had been dutiful, unselfish and pretty nearly heroic that morning, but she was glad to be free to busy herself in the one congenial occupation that remained to her —that of writing a long letter to Angie Bates. She spent the remainder of the forenoon in her

own room, filling page after page with descriptions of the house and its deficiencies, its inmates —"good, you know, and very dear to me, of course, but so entirely uncongenial"—and of the "narrow village life" of which she knew nothing. Angie would be sure to understand and sympathize, for she had insisted that the change in Kitty's life was "just like a story," and had called her "you poor dear heroine" when they parted.

After the early dinner Kitty changed her dress, and, arrayed in a pretty street-suit, walked up to the village to mail her letter. More than one turned to look at her as she passed, and she was pleasantly conscious of being worth the glances—a more stylish figure than often graced those streets. Mrs. Lieb, indeed, drew back her window-curtain and watched her until she was out of sight.

"That's Kitty Wilder, and they say she's come home to live. Wonder what on? She don't look much as Pete did when she went hurrying by to the mill this morning. 'Some in rags, and some in tags, and some in velvet gowns,' is a little too much variety for one family. She'll be about as much use as a poppy in a bed of beets—not quite as much—and she won't be nigh so contented."

CHAPTER VII.

FUNDAMENTALS.

THE "company" atmosphere lasted a long time, it seemed to Dick. When he came hurrying home at night with some interesting announcement, a glimpse of Kitty through the window sent him slipping around by the back door to brush his clothes and to don a collar instead of bursting in as he had intended. The amazed glance and the slightly arched brows of the blue eyes on the opposite side of the table at once apprised him of any breach of table etiquette and made him uncomfortably watchful. These were not so great evils as careless Dick was inclined to consider them; but when, instead of sitting with the family in the evening, Kitty gracefully excused herself and withdrew to her own room, as if she were only a boarder, and when he noticed that Pete had a way of not bringing out until after Kitty had gone various bits of mending and making that too plainly revealed the household economies, it really did

seem a little too much like company. He wondered how long a time it required to transform a visitor into one of the family.

Possibly, Petra wondered also. Those sisterly consultations and confidences to which she had so eagerly looked forward did not come. The nearest approach to one had been when Kitty protested vigorously but vainly against the factory-work:

"I hadn't thought you were doing anything like that—just a common factory-girl! Pete, I can't bear to think of such a thing. You really must give it up. It—it isn't respectable."

"I don't know what you mean by *it*," said Petra, hotly. "I am respectable, and so is the factory."

"But that kind of work! Of course you can't know much about it in a little village like this, but it is considered— Well, not disreputable exactly, but very low; not the sort of work any young lady would ever undertake," urged Kitty.

"If the young lady needed work very badly, she would have to take what she could find, just as I did," answered Petra. Then the real distress in Kitty's face softened her tone, and she added, "I suppose this isn't much like those great mills in the city that you are thinking of. This is only a medicine-factory, you know, and in the room where I

am there are only eight or ten girls all together, and they are well enough, so far as I have seen—quiet and nice."

"Oh yes, I supposed it was different out here; but people will think of it just the same. Everybody will not know. And, as for needing to do it, I'd rather live on crusts."

"Who will furnish the crusts?" asked Pete, dryly.

"There must be some way," Kitty declared. "Couldn't we economize? We might do without help."

"If 'help' means poor old Deb, who has lived here ever since I can remember, and who has no other home and no way of taking care of herself, we will never do without her—not if I work in a dozen mills!" answered Pete, her dark eyes flashing. "Whether she is help or hindrance, Deb will always have a home with us while we have one."

That ended the conversation. It occurred to Petra afterward that she had not taken the slightest trouble to explain or to conciliate and that tone and words had been unnecessarily sharp and indignant. In truth, it was less what Kitty had said than a faint echo in her own heart that irritated her. Her work was honest and all that seemed open to her,

as she had said, but it was not what she would have chosen—not all she might have been fitted for had she not in the old days been so contemptuously sure that educational advantages were for the most part disadvantages and the accomplishments and acquirements of young ladyhood in general mere nonsense. Such young ladies as her sister knew—young ladies like the doctor's sister, whom she still so distinctly remembered—would not be likely to seek mill-work, indeed; they knew how to do something better, Petra admitted to herself, rather bitterly. She had after a fashion kept her resolution to study, but all the more because of that—because every new step in knowledge had revealed to her more clearly her ignorance—she was dissatisfied with herself. She had hoped Kitty would understand and help her, and had expected in a vague way that Kitty's superior knowledge and attainments would be turned to good account financially.

Once, when Dick, in talking of Kitty's coming, had questioned a little doubtfully of ways and means, Petra had answered confidently:

"Oh, there are so many things Kitty can do."

But it had not turned out as Pete expected—she hardly knew what she had expected—and, alto-

gether, the girl was growing discouraged and sore-hearted, vexed with her sister and herself, and so irritable at times that Dick watched her wonderingly.

As for Kitty, she was shocked to find Petra so infatuated with her employment that she resented the mere mention of giving it up. To do Kitty justice, it must be admitted that she did not fully comprehend the family embarrassments and circumstances. She knew the facts, indeed, but they conveyed very little meaning to her. She remembered that in the old childish days, when she had lived at home, everything had been homely and plain, but there had been no anxiety about providing such as they had; or if they were compelled to pinch at one time, they lived lavishly at another. She had felt no care and no one else appeared to be burdened. Matters were always expected to come out right, and it was considered probable that next month or next year everything that was desirable would be attainable. From this atmosphere of great expectations she had gone to a home where money was really as plentiful as it had always been just about to be in her own home. Her education had not been sufficiently practical to give definiteness to her ideas on such points, and she had never

learned the inexorable limits of a dollar. Aside from this, she was too full of pity for her own sad lot to bestow much thought upon that of others, except in so far as it concerned herself. The life at her cousin's had been in no true sense a family life; it had fostered no sweet unselfishness. And Kitty did not consider that mill-work might be a hardship for Petra; she thought only of the hardship of having "a common factory-girl" for her sister. The poverty of the family caused her less regret than the fact that she was connected with a family which was guilty of poverty.

Still, Kitty had begun to ask herself what she could do. Life was growing monotonous. She could not spend all her time in her journal and correspondence, and, besides, after she had first learned that this home-coming was inevitable, she had made some heroic resolves—at least, she had thought them heroic and very beautiful. She had determined that, since she must be exiled to such a barren and uncultivated corner of the earth, she would try to be a missionary to the poor plodding people about her and make her presence a blessing. She had read of the influence of a refined and cultivated lady in a wild, rough region of country—how by her gentleness and goodness, her library

and tasteful home, she had effected great reforms and gradually changed the low tone of society around her. Angie Bates had clasped her hands rapturously at this idea, declaring that "a life of self-sacrifice was too lovely for anything," and, though it occurred to Kitty that her friend might find the contemplation from a distance more enjoyable than the reality, she really intended to try it. Some little thought of that had mingled with her protest against Petra's occupation; it would be helping her sister into a higher sphere.

Sitting in the plain church one Sunday morning, Kitty's mind came back from a long wandering in the direction of the magnificent city church, Cousin Bradley's pew and its neighbors in time to catch a few earnest sentences that fell from the lips of the village pastor. He was a very earnest man —she had acknowledged that when she first heard him—but his words had not made much impression, because when she listened at all it was only to contrast matter and manner with those of the city pulpit. Now, however, something caught her attention—no burst of eloquence, but plain, strong words from the text he had chosen, which, until now, had passed her unheeded: "Hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown."

Was he right in saying that not by coveting another's life or reaching for another's talents, but in holding fast what one had—what had been given to one's self—and making the most and best of it, was the crown to be fashioned? She knew all that, but she had not thought of it in just that way. It recalled and strengthened her purpose of making her life useful to those people around her, and suggested, also, something more definite than the vague ideas she had hitherto entertained. Who would know so well as the minister where and how she could best begin her mission? She would talk with him about it. He knew the people and their needs, and a vision of his pleasure in finding such an assistant and ally crowded out the remainder of the sermon.

The same expectation of giving pleasure made Kitty view her errand as not a disagreeable one when she stopped, the next day, at the minister's door. His mother—a plain elderly lady wearing an ample white apron over her afternoon dress, after the manner of her village neighbors—answered the summons. It was a sweet, motherly face under the smoothly brushed gray hair, if her young visitor had noticed it. She cut short the introduction by her frankly extended hand and

the statement that everybody knew everybody in so small a place. She inquired after Kitty's grandfather while she drew an old-fashioned rocker into cozy proximity to the fire, and then stepped across the hall to a closed door.

The announcement came back to the girl as she waited:

"John, Miss Wilder—Miss Kitty Wilder—wants to see you if you are not too busy."

The last clause and the reluctant tone were no part of the caller's message: it had not occurred to her that she might be intruding upon precious time. The comfortable room into which she was shown was a very plain one, rich only in books, and the minister's coat was undeniably somewhat worn and shiny on the back. Nevertheless, Kitty found it not quite so easy to explain her errand so fluently and gracefully as she had expected. There was a peculiar earnestness in the dark eyes bent upon her before which figures of speech seemed to melt away and leave only bare facts. The whole atmosphere of the place was stubbornly real, as if it were a part of yesterday's sermon, and had a disenchanting effect upon many things.

Kitty began by alluding in a vague way to the sad changes in her life, the "reverses of fortune,"

"uncongenial surroundings," but the face opposite her looked only perplexed:

"I thought— I beg your pardon, but I had always understood this was your home?"

"It was in my early childhood, but I have been away so long and have lived so differently—" Kitty hesitated. "One accustomed to affluence cannot but feel its loss, Mr. Kent, when it is suddenly taken away."

"Certainly not; but if your cousin—he was your guardian, was he not?—invested your property in such a way as to lose it, I should have supposed him to be both able and willing to replace it," answered Mr. Kent, at a loss how properly to sympathize or to console in this trouble which he did not understand, and bewildered by this suggestion of a fortune of which he had never heard in conversation with any of the Wilder family.

"Oh, I did not mean that!" Kitty's cheeks flushed. "I did not mean to convey the idea that I had property of my own. But I had been at my cousin's so long that it was like home to me, and the sudden changes there, and the loss of everything—"

"Your cousin? Bradley Holland?" A sudden change passed over the minister's face, and he spoke

quickly. "I have heard nothing of that. It cannot be possible that he has lost everything?"

"I referred only to the changes and the loss to myself," said Kitty, rather stiffly, forgetting to wonder at Mr. Kent's knowledge of Colonel Holland and only annoyed at his obtuseness. "But I did not intend to talk of that; I wanted to ask your advice in another matter. I suppose you know the needs of most of the people about here, Mr. Kent?"

"They come to me with their troubles sometimes—yes," answered Mr. Kent, wondering if the rather enigmatical young lady was trying, before she ventured to ask his counsel, to learn whether it was the fashion of the place to confide in him.

"I suppose they need assistance in many ways?"

"No, I cannot say that. They are a provident, thrifty people for the most part—poor, many of them, but independent."

It was evident that delicate introductions were wasted upon this straightforward man. Any subject that he was to consider must be set squarely before him, and the directness with which Kitty finally stated her errand was partly due to vexation:

"Whatever is taken out of our lives, we ought

still to try to make them useful, I suppose, and I have thought that there might be something for me to do even in a place like this—something that would be a benefit to others. I have had some advantages that perhaps might be turned to account. I do not want to be a mere idler where there is so much need for help; and if you could give me some advice about going to work—"

Mr. Kent's face grew suddenly as bright as Kitty's Sunday dream had pictured it, and he extended his hand in cordial appreciation of the advice solicited.

"I'm glad to hear you say that, Miss Kitty. It is a brave, sensible way to look at the matter, and the only right way, but—I owe you the confession—I feared that after so many years at your cousin's you might be unwilling to adopt it. You can be a great help to them, and, as you say, there's need of it. Your grandfather will never be able to undertake any business again, and your sister has been carrying a burden too heavy for her. I scarcely know how she and Dick have managed to do so much. Had you thought of any plan for yourself—any work that you thought you could do?"

The girl only looked at the speaker in dumb

amazement, but, without noticing her silence, he was swiftly running over various possibilities:

"You have had advantages—true; the best of schools, I presume. Have you thought of teaching?"

"No," gasped Kitty.

"As you have said, there are not many openings in a place like this, but still there should be something. There will be a vacancy in the school here in a week or two—ill-health has compelled the teacher to resign—and I do not think any one has been selected to fill her place. Why not try for that at once? Mr. Barton is the person to whom you should apply. Have you met him since you came home?"

"No," said Kitty again; the monosyllable was all she could force herself to utter.

"And shall I speak to him about you? Or, better still, I might give you a note of introduction, and then you can see him for yourself and attend to the matter at once. I am glad I thought of it. I hope it may prove the very open door you were seeking." His face glowed with satisfaction while he hastily penned the note, and he placed it in Kitty's hand with hearty wishes for her success.

Kitty accepted the missive with a mechanical

"Thank you"—she could think of nothing else to say—and withdrew with a scarcely articulated murmur of good-bye. It was her one comfort afterward, in recalling the latter part of that interview, that she had not been able to say anything.

The whirl of conflicting feelings in which Kitty sought the street it would be impossible to describe. Anger, pride, astonishment, indignation, surged and ebbed in turn. She did not go to Mr. Barton, neither did she turn her steps homeward; she only wanted to be alone, and, with flaming cheeks and the hot tears in her eyes, the keen cold air was unnoticed as she hurried down the street, not caring whither. What did the man mean? How could he so have misunderstood her? And yet if what he had said was true—it must be true—she was not sure that she was sorry he had failed to understand. Was that what people had been thinking of her these weeks—pitying poor Pete because she had one more to support? What would Mr. Kent have thought if he had known that she had entertained no idea of helping her family, but was only planning to be a lady-patroness, a "ministering angel" to the village at large, while her own sister worked in a mill to support her? Was that really the truth? She was sure it must be when

she began to consider what the home-life had been since her return. She had known it all; why had she been so stupid as not to comprehend what, doubtless, the whole village had seen and had been talking of?

Hotter grew the cheeks under the delicate veil. Kitty was out of the village now, and down by the quiet river-side, where there was no one to observe if the tears had their will. How dared Mr. Kent tell her all those things about her family—that they were so poor, her grandfather unable to work and Pete doing entirely too much—that they needed her help? No, he really did not tell her; he had only thought she was telling him. And how he commended the resolution she had never dreamed of making! Kitty was honest, and the undeserved praise hurt almost as badly as all the rest.

"Oh dear! What can I do about it all? I never thought of working for money—for a living. I don't want to. I don't see why everything must have happened so," she murmured, in weak protest, her eyes fixed upon the cold gray river that flowed by unanswerингly. "I suppose I might take that school and teach. How horrid it will be! But I can't think of anything better. I can't think of anything else, better or worse, and I must do some-

thing. Oh dear! I almost wish I could die just now and end it all."

The wish was about as sincere as such wishes generally are—as Jonah's under his withered gourd. In her very heart Kitty did not believe that death would end it all, and she was somewhat startled by her own words. They aroused her to a swift consciousness that this was a strange beginning for the life of "noble self-sacrifice" which she had decided to lead. But then self-sacrifice in a prominent place and appropriately labeled, so that the world may know what it is, is a very different thing from a self which must be sacrificed so completely as to attract no attention whatever. Kitty hated her own selfishness, now that she saw it, but she shrank from the path which unselfishness, and even common honesty, pointed out. Her grandfather waited in vain for her company at dinner that day, and at last, with a patient little sigh, sat down to his solitary meal, though, indeed, he had found her company quite as disappointing as her absence. Deb muttered to herself, though she kept the coffee hot for an hour or two.

It was late when Kitty came in, and she did not appear in the kitchen until supper-time. At the table she greeted Pete with an unexpected question:

"The teacher is going away from the school here, I understand; do you think I had better take her place?"

Petra looked up with a flash of pleasure and surprise and drew a long breath, as if a burden had been suddenly lifted.

"Oh, Kitty, if you only would!" she said, in a tone of relief that spoke volumes.

"Now, that's what I call sensible," exclaimed Dick, in a burst of admiration. "Only," he added, doubtfully, after a moment's pause, "you'll have to be quick about it, and smart too, for I heard to-day that Mary Jane Griggs meant to try for it."

"Who is Mary Jane Griggs?" inquired Kitty.

"Oh, she's a girl that lives down the road a ways; her father's a farmer. She used to come here to school, and all the teachers said she was smart. Nobody could come up to her in arithmetic, and she was at the head of every class. She's been two terms at the Ridgley Academy since then, too."

Kitty smiled complacently; she surmised, and very correctly, that Miss Griggs had never even imagined such a seminary as the one whose diploma reposed in the rosewood writing-desk up stairs. She adopted Dick's advice in regard to

promptness, however, and the next morning, armed with the minister's note and the blue-ribboned document from the seminary, she presented herself to Mr. Barton. That worthy man was in his store —a small one adjoining his residence—and when he understood his caller's errand, he laughed:

"Walk right through into the house, won't you, and I'll be there in a minute. Never rains but it pours. There's another in there now."

What the last sentence signified Kitty did not understand until she was fairly in the sunny sitting-room and had discovered a bright-eyed, freckled-faced girl sitting stiffly erect in shawl and hat. Kitty noticed the green dress of exactly the wrong shade for the dubious complexion, the red hands withdrawn from the woolen gloves, and decided that this must be Miss Griggs. There was no one else in the room, and, as the silence was evidently growing a trifle awkward to her *vis-à-vis*, she said pleasantly,

"I wonder if we are both on the same errand?"

"Maybe we are. I'm after the school," answered Mary Jane, frankly.

Mary Jane did not need to question who Kitty was; she knew her as did every one else in the village, but the possibility of a rival in the new-comer

had not before occurred to her. She felt the power —such things have power—of the tasteful toilet opposite her, and of Kitty's easy manner. The red hands grasped the gloves a little nervously, but the mouth only settled into firmer lines. Miss Griggs was not one easily to give up what she had once undertaken.

Mr. Barton had disposed of his solitary customer, and came in rubbing his hands:

"Well, as there's two of you, we'll just have to have a little test. I reckon that'll be the fair way. Don't you think so?" he questioned, taking paper and pens from an old secretary in one corner.

Kitty handed him her diploma and Mr. Barton looked over it through his steel-bowed glasses, but it did not appear to make quite the impression she had expected. In fact, he owned that he was "not just up to a good many such things."

"But it isn't so much matter, because what we want here chiefly is the fundamentals," he added, with a good-natured laugh, "and I'm some on geography and 'rithmetic yet, if I *have* been out of school a good many years."

Mr. Barton was; Kitty was ready to acknowledge it before she had done puzzling her brain over the first half dozen questions. She was quite able

to believe his statement that he "always liked to have an atlas handy, to hunt up new places" mentioned in his reading, and it seemed to her that his reading must have been principally in the direction of unknown countries. She wrote what answers she could—many of them were only guesses—and stole frequent glances at the girl on the opposite side of the table. The light brows were occasionally drawn together in a perplexed frown, but now and then there was a little triumphant nod of the head that told its own story as the red hand raced over the paper.

The "few sums in 'rithmetic," as Mr. Barton styled his examination in mathematics, was even worse than the geography. This village storekeeper, with his careless pronunciation and his frequent lapses in grammar, was a natural mathematician, and Kitty, who had supposed that the fact that she had studied various branches unknown to the village curriculum would readily establish her claim, was dismayed by this appeal to "fundamentals." Her face grew hot and her head confused. She could not remember rules or tables—such commonplace matters had been early crowded out of the seminary course—and she was aware that she was making a miserable failure. But as for the girl

in green, her foot seemed on her native heath; she entered upon the bewildering combinations of numbers with a zest that showed she felt herself to be mistress of the situation.

The position of teacher in the village school was a prize eagerly to strive for, Kitty discovered, instead of a doubtful good that might be accepted with martyr-like resignation. At the same time she reached the further knowledge that Miss Griggs was the successful candidate.

"I've no doubt you know a good deal about higher branches and no end of new studies, Miss Wilder, and could teach the children plenty of things it would do 'em good to know—not a bit of doubt about it," said Mr. Barton, announcing his decision apologetically—"but it's mostly fundamentals we're concerned about here, as I said, and, seeing it's been a fair trial, I'm bound to say Mary Jane's come out ahead."

Whatever words the story was put into, it was the same story, after all; and when Kitty told it at home in her own way, since it must needs be told, she felt in her inmost soul that the impression conveyed was exactly that embodied in the storekeeper's brief statement: "Mary Jane's come out ahead."

"They're going to want a new teacher out at the cross-roads school in a couple of weeks, but it's a smaller school, a mile away, and likely there'll be somebody else after that too," said Dick, doubtfully.

Petra said nothing. Neither did Kitty, but she shut her lips very closely together; and when she went up to her room, she pulled out her trunk from its corner and dived to the bottom of it in search of some long-unused books. For the next two weeks the correspondence with Angie Bates languished and the gilt-edged journal was neglected, while maps and columns of figures received undivided attention. At the end of that time Kitty laid siege to the citadel of learning at the cross-roads, and captured it.

CHAPTER VIII.

A NEW EXPERIENCE.

THE gay waltz dropped into a slower, softer measure that in turn lost itself in the plaintive notes of an old ballad, and then Barbara pushed away her music and turned from the piano. She wandered through beautiful rooms into the conservatory beyond, with its wealth of blossoms, and back again, pausing by a window that overlooked the grounds, white and cold now in their winter dress. She did not quite know what to do with herself or with her time that afternoon. Freedom, luxury and leisure are sweet, but, like other sweets, one may have a surfeit of them. Now that the wedding-journey and the receptions were over and they were settled at home, Colonel Holland had gone back to business, but Barbara had no business, and time began to hang a little heavily on her hands. The planning and the contriving to make something out of nothing which had been

never-failing employment at Aunt Cass's were unnecessary here. With the thought of those old days there came to Barbara the remembrance of old dreams as well. How often when some generous impulse was checked by those spectres of the house—economy and appearances—had she wished for wealth that she might help others! She had been sure that if Fortune ever smiled upon her as upon some others she would do a great deal of good with its gifts.

How improbable had such a consummation seemed then—mere girlish castle-building! Barbara smiled as she contrasted then and now, but the smile was more wistful than triumphant. She would like to do good, to put something real into her life, if she knew how. The thoughts that haunted her wedding-eve had never wholly vanished, but had flitted in and out among the gay and busy days, and the quiet hour recalled them. There was money enough and time enough now, and of course there were those to whom she could do good if only she knew them.

The postman's ring at the door broke Barbara's reverie and was followed by a servant bringing in some letters. Barbara glanced over them—one from Aunt Cass, three or four invitations, and

one— Yes, that was an invitation also, but a peculiar one:

"The Ladies' Missionary Society of Grace Church holds its regular monthly meeting in the church parlors on Thursday afternoon at three o'clock. You are earnestly invited to be present."

"Thursday! That's to-day," said Barbara. She had an indistinct remembrance of having heard that notice before—read in the church, perhaps. She never paid much heed to church notices, and she thought it strange that any one should take the trouble to write it on cards and send it around to houses, but this might be the fashion here. She remembered that the church was of a different denomination from that which Aunt Cass attended, and that her aunt had sweetly remarked concerning the change, "One mustn't be bigoted in religious matters." Poor Aunt Cass! Colonel Holland's wealth would have inclined her to "liberality" toward a Jewish synagogue or a Mohammedan mosque.

Again the memory of old days recalled the thoughts which the mail had for a few moments interrupted, and Barbara reread more carefully the card she still held. Missionary society: that might

be about relieving want and suffering somewhere. It might possibly help her in what she wanted to know, and in any case it was something to do and something new.

So it happened that a little late and with an added sensation of being out of place, Mrs. Holland slipped into the missionary meeting that afternoon. The room was comfortably filled and some one was reading when she entered, but a lady quietly moved aside and motioned her to a seat.

The Bible words fell upon Barbara's ears without arresting her attention while she furtively scanned the faces about her—bright, earnest, refined faces that assured her she was in no unworthy company. She wondered how that lady could venture to lead the others in prayer, but then the one who was called upon was a stately, silver-haired old lady who was probably quite used to being a leader in many ways. But the next voice heard was almost girlish in its freshness, and it was reading a paper on the women of Syria—their life and customs. As vivid description and incident followed each other, Barbara watched the reader with wondering admiration for her knowledge of this far-away land, its people and their needs. She found that others of the circle were familiar with

these things also, as remarks, questions and letters showed. They knew the various mission stations, knew where schools had been established and were acquainted with the teachers by name.

Barbara grew deeply interested, and would have liked to ask some questions herself if she had felt sufficiently at home and had not disliked to betray her ignorance where others seemed so intelligent. She had gained considerable information, however, before the meeting closed, and was able to join in the offering with some understanding of where it was to go and in what work it would aid. She had determined to come to the next meeting even before receiving the cordial invitation, which came promptly from two or three sources as the assembly broke into little groups preparatory to dispersal.

"We are glad to have you here to-day, Mrs. Holland," said the pleasant voice of the president, a lady with whom Barbara was slightly acquainted. "Come again."

"I mean to do so," answered Barbara, frankly. "I have enjoyed it."

"Ah, but we want more than that: we want you to help make it enjoyable to others. Will you not prepare one of the papers for next month?"

"I?" Barbara caught her breath in astonishment. "I am such a stranger yet, Mrs. Ellis."

"That is just the reason—one reason, at least," said the president, with a little emphatic nod of her head which seemed to say that she knew exactly what she wanted and was accustomed to having it. "New workers make variety; they bring in new life and thought, and we do not want to fall into ruts."

"But I do not know about—about all these things," hesitated Barbara.

"None of us know until we study about them; you can do that. The next topic is our American Indians. We take up the work abroad and at home on alternate months, and you will find it not a difficult but a very pleasant task to learn about our schools and our teachers there. I beg your pardon, Mrs. Holland. I do not mean to press my request against your wish, but we would really be glad of your aid."

Mrs. Ellis was a wise woman. She wanted Mrs. Holland's aid, indeed, but still more she wanted to aid her. She thought she had not mistaken the earnest, attentive face that she had watched that day, and she knew that the surest way for this young stranger to grow interested, thoroughly to

identify herself with the church and become useful in it, was to begin to take part in its work. No one would have dreamed of calling Mrs. Ellis "a watchman upon the walls of Zion," but she was one nevertheless, and used her eyes, her voice and her social influence to discover and to reach many people of whom others did not think.

Barbara promised the paper. She was not unwilling, though she laughed at herself, as she rode homeward, over the novelty of the task she had undertaken. She had been deeply interested. The earnestness of those about her, the story of brave work and cheerful sacrifice from those far-off mission stations, was all so unlike the life which had always surrounded Barbara that it seemed like breathing a new atmosphere when she herself began to take a share in it.

When Barbara again entered the rooms she had left an hour or two before, they were no longer unoccupied. Sitting in the glow of the firelight, knitting in hand, was the grave-faced, plain old mother-in-law. For several reasons the acquaintance between these two had not progressed very rapidly. The elder lady spent much of her time in her own room, and for Barbara there had been through the first weeks so much coming and going,

receptions, calls and a whirl of new pleasures and excitements, that there had been room for little else. Then, too, though she would not willingly have confessed it, she had felt a slight fear of this woman of whose peculiarities she had heard so much, and she had been timid about making the advances that had been so easy to plan while at a distance. Yet there was nothing either to intimidate or to repel in the slight figure with smooth gray hair and busy hands sitting so quietly by the fireside. It made, instead, such a home-like picture that Barbara's heart—a kind one, only starved so long—warmed toward it.

"Don't go," she said, as the old lady made a movement to rise. "You have your work; why not sit with me? I have these pleasant rooms all to myself quite too often."

"Do you?" A faint smile flitted over the worn face, and the mother settled back in her chair again. "I like this fire," she explained. "Bradley had a fancy that nothing was so nice for an open fire as a wide old-fashioned fireplace, and so he had one put in here."

"I am glad of it," said Barbara, heartily. She was mentally contrasting the luxurious blaze with Aunt Cass's tiny grates, arranged, as a servant

once contemptuously observed, to "hold just a pint of coal."

"Maria couldn't see any use in it with the house heated all over by the furnace, but I like it," repeated the old lady, with dreamy gaze bent upon the dancing flame. "It seems like old times."

"Only the old-time fireplaces were a necessity instead of a luxury," said Barbara, and repented the words as soon as spoken, for over the worn face fell a shadow as the eyes wandered from the fire around the handsome apartment.

"Yes," with a sigh; "they did not light rooms like this. Mine did not. It was a very plain little home, but those were happy days."

"Who knows what losses and what sorrows since have made the olden days seem better than these?" thought Barbara, touched by the sadness of the tone. It awakened again her desire to comfort and to win back to enjoyment this life so mysteriously clouded, and she hastily sought a safer topic of conversation:

"I have been in a new place, for me, this afternoon, but I found it very interesting. A missionary meeting."

"A missionary— I beg your pardon, my dear; I did not quite understand. Did you say a mis-

sionary meeting? I did not know that you cared for such things."

There was a suddenness of look and tone that startled Barbara, but she answered smilingly:

"I did not know it, either; I do not think I knew anything about them until to-day. But I was interested. I surely must have been, or I shouldn't have promised to write a paper for the next meeting. I can scarcely understand yet how I came to do that."

Barbara laughed again at the recollection, but once more there flashed over the faded face opposite her that eager, intent expression, as if its owner were listening for some long-expected tidings. It could not be her own commonplace story of a woman's meeting that brought it, Barbara thought, wonderingly, but she talked on because she scarcely knew what else to do, and her hearer was so attentive and questioned so intelligently that she soon found herself giving an animated account of what she had heard. She had gained considerable information, and the unfamiliar story of urgent need and brave work still thrilled her. She forgot, during that pleasant talk, that there was anything unusual about her mother-in-law, except that she found her an unusually sympathetic and agreeable

companion, but she was reminded of her peculiarities a little later.

The old lady had gone to her room, but presently came down again and quietly slipped a roll of bills into Barbara's hand:

"I too want to help that work; I am glad you told me about it. Here is something to give when you go again."

Barbara's one quick glance showed her that it was no small sum she held, and she looked up in surprise:

"Why, mother," hesitating over the unaccustomed name, "this is a very generous gift."

"Oh no, not that—not generous!" The old lady repelled the word as if it stung her. "The money is not mine, my dear; it belongs to—to some one else," she explained, with a faint flush creeping over her cheek. "The only use I can make of it—have any right to make of it—is to give it where it will relieve want and suffering. It is not generosity; it is only a poor attempt at justice. Do not give it as from me."

So sad, deprecating, almost self-accusing, were words and tone that there was nothing more to be said; but Barbara, left alone, looked down upon the money in wonder and perplexity.

The elder lady passed slowly up to her own room again, and when she had closed the door stood still.

"O God, it might be!" she whispered. "Thy thoughts are not our thoughts nor thy ways our ways. If this should be the first sign of thy coming answer to the prayers of all the years—the rising of the little cloud no bigger than a man's hand—help me to be not faithless, but believing."

Encouraged by one success, the young wife tried that evening to tell her husband of her afternoon's experience. He listened indulgently, smiled at her enthusiasm—which he evidently considered very youthful—covertly yawned a little, and said,

"I am glad you enjoyed yourself."

Colonel Holland entirely approved of his wife writing papers for that or for any other eminently respectable society. He had a fancy that Barbara could be quite brilliant in that line, and he was not unwilling that other people should discover it; but when she told of his mother's gift and of her remarks concerning it, his face wore an expression that Barbara could not read, and he was silent.

"And shall I give it as she wished, Bradley?" asked Barbara, timidly. "I am not used to her yet, you know, and you must tell me what to do.

Is it right for me to do as she wishes about such things?"

"Certainly. The money is her own, whatever she says about it, and she has a right to spend it as she chooses. We can only let her have her own way and gratify her as far as possible. I only wish, for your sake, that she were not quite so—peculiar."

"Oh, I think we are going to get on nicely together," said Barbara, brightly, remembering the afternoon and relieved by the knowledge that there were no complications in the way of fulfilling her pleasant commission.

Often, however, while Barbara studied the topic upon which she had promised to write—a study that opened a new world of thought and possessed limitless ramifications—her mind wandered for a moment to her mother-in-law's gift, and she questioned what strange vagary possessed her. One thing was sure: she was not, as Barbara had sometimes heard, a miser, and that, at least, was a comfort. At the next meeting the roll of bills, slipped into a plain unmarked envelope, was dropped unobserved into the mission-box.

CHAPTER IX.

"WHOSE IMAGE AND SUPERSCRIPTION IS THIS?"

BARBARA'S world was growing real wonderfully fast in those days that followed. To begin with, the study she had undertaken introduced her to people, motives and aims that were entirely new to her. She had previously heard of missionaries but rarely, and her knowledge of them had been very vague. It had never occurred to her that they were people of like passions with herself. She had classed them with martyrs and confessors, prayer-book and liturgy—something exceedingly religious and sacred and having no connection with secular life, least of all with her life—until that afternoon meeting; but now, as she read of schools established on the frontier, in the far North and in the South, of the army of teachers giving their bright young womanhood to this work, going bravely from prospects and surroundings as fair as her own to hold these isolated posts, the marvel of it all grew upon her, and she found herself often

pausing to question and to ponder. These were every-day womanly women who enjoyed music, pictures, pretty homes and social life. Their very letters from these lonely schools were full of little common things—of pleasure over new desks and new books, of the busy care of teaching girls to sew and to cook as well as of teaching them to read the Bible. Yet they wrote cheerfully and as if their whole heart was in their work. Why had they undertaken it? It must be that their faith meant to them what it did to Jeanette—not merely forms and opinions, but something real and vital. Life was no show, no "keeping up appearances," with these people: it was real and intensely earnest. The things which Barbara had been taught to consider of supreme importance were the very things they had renounced.

These were new lessons in perspective. The far and the near, the great and the small, seemed changing places and values. It was like Barbara not to be content with simply gathering sufficient material for her paper, but to inform herself fully. Her studies, like her clothes and her pleasures, had so often been cramped by the requirement of making the most show for the least expense that thoroughness now was a luxury. It was a part

of the "being real through and through" that she had coveted.

Real also were the suffering, ignorance and need that were thus brought to Barbara's knowledge.

"There seems no end to it," she said one day, turning from the books and the papers that had busied her.

"No end to what?" asked her mother-in-law from her seat by the fireside—a place which of late she was coming to accept more frequently.

"To the hungry world," answered Barbara, half laughing, yet with a troubled earnestness in her voice. "It is large and so hungry! Here is a view of it from the South." She read an extract she had selected. "And here is something from the West. Of course," she added, after a moment's pause, "a great deal of the suffering is due to idleness and vice—especially intemperance—but I suppose even that fact doesn't quite relieve happier people of all responsibility."

The face that had been turned toward Barbara with an expression of keen interest suddenly changed. A look of anguish swept over it, the hands that held the knitting trembled, the white lips quivered, and, as if unable to speak, the old lady arose and left the room.

"Whew!" whistled Laurence, softly, from his nook in the window-seat. "Now grandma's killed, sure enough."

"What is it?" cried Barbara, in distress. "What did I say, Laurence?"

"Nothing. That is— Well, it wasn't just what you said," hesitated the boy, half amused, half sympathetic, but embarrassed when he tried to explain. "You see, she was so interested in what you read, and then when you said that about intemperance—as if that were at the bottom of it all—why, I suppose she felt as if she and the rest of us were to blame for all the misery. She always does think that way."

"But why should she? Why about intemperance more than about anything else?" questioned Barbara.

"Oh, I don't know. Yes, I do, too. She's set against distilleries and importing, and everything that has anything to do with liquor. But I wouldn't worry about it," he added, consolingly, as he looked into the troubled face before him. "It is only one of grandma's notions, you know, and nobody minds."

Laurence rather liked his young stepmother, despite his previous fears that he would not. The

house seemed brighter for her coming, and "she lets a fellow alone and never bothers him," he confided to a schoolmate. That, indeed, was the only course she had thought of pursuing. It had not occurred to her that any other was possible or desirable until one day very recently, when Mrs. Ellis had unexpectedly included her in a little circle of ladies who were discussing the difficulty of providing home-amusement for the young people of their families.

"This is a subject that interests you also, Mrs. Holland, now that you have a son to watch over? What a bright, manly boy Laurence is!"

Barbara had been too much astonished to reply, but since then she had found herself wondering, whenever she saw Laurence, what sort of watch she was expected to keep. His merry boyish ways amused her. When he had once or twice acted as her guide to some unfamiliar part of the city, she had found him very pleasant company. She was proud of him as her husband's son, but as hers —one to be influenced, guided, watched over—that was a responsibility from which she shrank.

Just now, however, it was not the boy, but his grandmother, that awakened Barbara's solicitude and perplexity. Laurence's attempted explana-

tion afforded her no enlightenment. The sudden distress her words had occasioned seemed unaccountable. She reviewed her remark in every possible light, and could see nothing in it to wound or to offend, yet she could not fully satisfy herself by accepting Laurence's comforting statement that it was "only one of grandma's notions." It was a relief when the worn face appeared at dinner, a little paler than usual, perhaps, but wearing its wonted quietness.

Barbara had arrived at the decision that the mission work and meetings were a topic that must thereafter be carefully avoided, but a day or two later she was startled out of this position by an unexpected proposal.

"Are you going to one of those meetings this afternoon?" asked the old lady, with the slight hesitancy of one not quite sure that what she wished to say would be agreeable. "I think I should like to go too, if—if you do not mind taking me with you."

"I'll be delighted to have you go. It will be much pleasanter than going alone," answered Barbara, heartily. She was glad the next moment that she had spoken on that first warm impulse, for a sober second thought suggested several objections

that must have made her reply either less cordial or less truthful.

The elder lady's face had brightened at the tone, but she still hesitated.

"Would you mind taking the street-car?" she asked, with a faint flush coming to her cheek.

"Certainly not, if you prefer going in that way," agreed Barbara, pleasantly. She did not object to the car—it was a more familiar acquaintance than her own carriage, she reflected, with a smile—but why the request? And what if some report of destitution or wretchedness should call forth again that strange outburst of feeling where it would attract the attention of all those ladies? Who could tell what oddities of dress or of demeanor might cause remark and make her companion a very unpleasant one?

A host of disagreeable possibilities suggested themselves, and Barbara's uneasiness increased with her ponderings; but when the hour came, there was nothing in the soft plain dress, perfect in every detail, to offend her most fastidious taste, and the quiet face, with its gentle gravity, did not look in the least like that of one ruled by vagaries or likely to transgress any rules of decorum. Long before the meeting was over Barbara had forgotten

her fears, and she experienced a curious sense of satisfaction in introducing to her new friends such a very presentable mother-in-law, and in noting, as her keen eyes were quick to do, the favorable impression created. Doubtless not a little surprise mingled with the respectful greeting of many, but the quiet gray-haired lady so intelligently interested in all that she saw and heard did not appear to be a very distressing family skeleton, whatever rumor had whispered.

Colonel Holland's astonishment and pleasure when he heard of the afternoon's outing delighted his wife:

"Why, Barbara, what sorcery are you using? Mother seldom sat anywhere but in her own room before you came—at least, that is my impression," checking himself with a swift recollection that his knowledge of home-affairs had been limited. "And, as for her going out anywhere with Maria, such a thing was unknown. You are working wonders."

"She will go with me again," said Barbara, determined and triumphant; "I am sure she will. Really, Bradley, I can scarcely understand how her slight peculiarities have been so exaggerated. She has grown somewhat morbid, perhaps, with being so much alone, and elderly people are apt to

have their crotchets, I suppose, and to cling to old-fashioned ways. I think that is all, and I mean to make her life so bright that she will forget everything gloomy and singular."

The loving prophecy ought to have won grateful appreciation, but Colonel Holland was gazing rather moodily into the fire, and answered by neither word nor look. It was only when his wife added, after a moment's pause, "I like her," that he said with sudden vehemence, as if stirred by some old memory,

"You well may—not only like her, but also love her. A better mother never lived."

But Barbara's plans for changing the existing order of things and skillfully bringing new interests and attractions to bear on this long-secluded life were all set aside by a slight accident—one of those unexpected happenings by which Providence so often substitutes other ways for our own. A misstep on the stairs one day as she was running lightly down resulted in a fall.

"It is nothing—nothing of any consequence," she assured Laurence and his grandmother as they hastened to her aid. "I do not know how I accomplished such a piece of awkwardness in safety, but I am not hurt," she laughed; and then, as she

tried to rise to her feet, she sank back with a cry of pain and fainted.

It was nothing worse than a badly-sprained ankle, the physician informed the anxious family, but that seemed quite bad enough, as it meant being a prisoner for weeks; and Barbara sighed as she thought how many projects she had been forming that must now be put aside. But a new experience awaited her. Mrs. Holland the elder—a retiring woman naturally and rendered still more so by the household life around her for years—had been a little in awe of her tall and stylish daughter-in-law, but for the invalid all the motherly sympathy was awakened at once. She was one of those women who seem to know by instinct how to place a pillow or to arrange a bandage. She had, moreover, a store of expedients and experience, and Barbara found herself petted and waited upon in a way that was to her as new as it was delightful.

"You will spoil me; I am not used to being a person of such consequence," she laughed, though with a sudden mist over her eyes as some little tender office flashed into sharp contrast a few forlorn days of illness in her girlhood. Aunt Cass had seen that proper remedies and nourishment

were duly administered, but Barbara had been made to feel disapproval in the very atmosphere—a suggestion that her illness was probably due to some indiscretion on her part, and that in any case it was an expense and inconvenience for which she was responsible. She had never known much mothering, poor Barbara! and her present experience was very agreeable to her.

Mother Holland smiled at the threatened danger, drew the lounge softly into a more comfortable angle with the blazing fire, and contentedly established herself, knitting in hand, where she could be ready to meet, if not to anticipate, the invalid's wants. The possibility of rendering such services seemed, indeed, to have brought an unusual look of content to her face.

"Of course you could ring the bell for anything you need," she said, apologetically, "but that doesn't half seem like being taken care of—at least, it doesn't to me. Maybe it is because so much of my life was before we had any bell or any one to answer it if we had had one. I used to wait on my own sick ones; it is more home-like. I am glad to have some one to take care of once more. Not that I wanted you to fall down stairs to humor me," she added, with a little laugh which

came so rarely that it always gladdened Barbara like a burst of sunshine.

There was no sunshine out of doors that day—a gray afternoon with a slow, steady rain that made the pretty room, the dancing fire and the motherly figure beside it look like a picture of home comfort.

"Tell me about those old days—the days before the bell and other modern improvements, I mean," coaxed Barbara, moved by a sudden impulse. She was frightened at her own daring before the words were fairly spoken, but the elder lady's face turned toward her with no trace of the shadow she had learned to dread:

"They were very simple old days, my dear, but I love to think of them. It was a plain little farmhouse—you can hardly think how plain—where I began housekeeping, but there never was a happier young wife. John and I went all over the house and farm—a rocky New England farm—and talked and planned about every corner. I can remember yet how I placed my six new chairs and my cherry table in the best room and stood off and looked at them, and then changed the position of each one and went back to the doorway to look again. When I had gathered some asparagus and hung it over the looking-glass—we didn't have

mirrors, you know—I thought I had given the finishing-touch to the room, and I was as proud as a queen. There was a bright new rag carpet on the floor; I had cut the rags myself and paid for the weaving by braiding straw. It was several years before we had any other kind of a carpet, and then we planned and saved a whole winter to get it. We thought it a wonderful piece of elegance, I can tell you, and there were little feet to dance over it by that time. Yes, it took careful thought and hard work to provide for us all, but the talking and the planning held a deal of pleasure, and we prized things when we got them. A new bedstead or a new carpet did not mean to us just a choice at a store: it was a page of family history."

"I like that," said Barbara, warmly; "I believe I could almost have enjoyed that sort of poverty—honest and self-respecting. It's the poverty that is ashamed of itself and that is always trying to pretend it is something else that is hard. I hate shams."

The mother's eyes, grown pensive with their backward glance, rested questioningly on the earnest face for a moment, then swept the room with its costly appointments.

Barbara misinterpreted the look:

"You think I understand very little of the hardships of such a life as you describe? But I do not think any amount of toiling and planning honestly to earn what one needs can be so wearing as constantly to be scheming and contriving to appear to have what one has not. I think," with a light laugh, "that I have considerable capacity for enjoying honest wealth; but if I cannot have that, I would rather have honest poverty. I want the genuine article, of one sort or the other."

Barbara's thoughts had run back to her own past with its petty pinchings and its ignoble worries, but those of her companion had taken a far different range, and the gaze—surprised, eager, questioning—that was suddenly bent upon Barbara startled her. The old lady had leaned forward in her chair, and her voice trembled in its earnestness:

"Do you feel so—you? And I thought I could make no one see it as I do! That is why I have had no part in it all these years: I could not use money not rightfully mine."

"Why, mother! Dear Mother Holland, how could you think of such a thing?" exclaimed Barbara, in pained surprise. "As if Bradley or I, or any one else, could for a moment think his mother

had not a rightful share in all his wealth! Who could have a better right? If that is all—"

The gray head motioned a sad negative, and the faded eyes were full of tears:

"It is not that. There may be children who could make a mother think of such a thing, but mine are not of that sort. And I am not one of those very independent women who cannot enjoy anything unless they have the title-deed to it in their own name. We always said 'ours' in the old days on the farm, and I could always have felt it so since. I could have enjoyed riches if they had come honestly. I could have been proud of the 'business enterprise and the commercial success' that the papers praise so often when they mention the name of my son if I had not known what was the dreadful foundation—shame and tears, ruined homes, ruined lives and lost souls."

Slowly the last words were spoken, with a sad deliberate emphasis, as if each one were weighed as it fell.

Startled, Barbara had lifted her head from its pillow. Once speech and manner would only have alarmed her as the ravings of insanity, but this kindly, motherly woman, whom she was learning to know and to love, awakened a different feeling,

a different fear. For one moment Barbara felt a cowardly inclination to let the subject drop and remain comfortably ignorant of any meaning the words might hold, but the next she reassured herself with the thought that morbid fancy and isolated life had distorted some commonplace occurrence. It must be so, indeed, and this might be her longed-for opportunity to reason away such imaginings and bring back to the old mother content and happiness:

"I do not understand you. What foundation could there have been other than the ordinary gain of business, unless, perhaps, the extraordinary enterprise and business talent of which the papers speak? Bradley has told me— At least, I understood"—she corrected herself as she suddenly remembered how little he had told her—"that his father left money."

"So he did, and it has grown since as only such wealth can grow. Did you ever think what power there is in everything evil and hurtful to grow of itself? Weeds and brambles grow of themselves. That was not the way our crops grew on the farm; they called for hard work and careful watching. The money they brought came slowly and hardly, too, but every dollar of it held a blessing. If only we

had been content! But there were some poor years, of course, and there were the children to think of. It was natural and right, I suppose, that we should want to give them a fair start and greater advantages than we had had, especially when the boys were getting old enough to begin to think of such things a little for themselves. We were talking about it one night out on the old porch, John and I, after the others had gone to bed. I shall always remember that night—how the moonlight threw the shadow of the vine-leaves on the floor, worn smooth by many scrubbings, and how a whippoorwill was calling from the grove on the hill. Not that I thought of that night then as any marked one in my life; we scarcely ever know the turning-points till they are long gone by. We had been talking about getting along with the year's work, and about doing this and that to make ends meet. All at once John said,

"'Oh, I met Silas Gregg as I was coming home to-day, and he asked how I'd like to trade off the farm for a distillery. I was grumbling about the crops a little; I suppose that was what made him think of it.'

"'Gregg's distillery?' I asked. 'Is he really going to sell it?'

"'He wants to. He has done well with it, too, from all I can hear, but his uncle has been doing wonders out West and wants Silas to come there, and he has caught the Western fever and is trying to sell his place here.'

"'Why does he want ours, then?' I asked.

"'Maybe he doesn't; he only mentioned it,' said John. 'But he may think that if he cannot turn his property here into cash it might be safer to leave it in a farm than in property like the distillery. If he rents that and it is not well managed, it may run down so that it will be almost worthless in a few years. A farm could hardly be used up in that way.'

"That was the beginning. Silas Gregg was in earnest. He came again and persuaded John to go over and look at the distillery, and, as he showed his books and told how much he made, it seemed such a gain on the slow profits of the farm that the prospect was alluring. Then, too, John had a clear head, and he saw ways of turning things to greater advantage than even Silas had done, and so the matter was talked over and finally decided. I had not objected. I had not thought of the business to be undertaken as anything but an honest and respectable one, and, so far as I knew, no one in

the village viewed Silas Gregg's establishment as harmful or disreputable. It was years ago, you see; the temperance reform had barely begun, and in our quiet nook we had heard almost nothing of it. Drunkenness, of course, was a vice to be avoided, but a moderate use of liquor was common in many of the families around us. I shrank from making the change, though. Woman-like, my heart clung to the old place, and, while I wanted to do what was best for my family, I could not help thinking of possible disadvantages in the new life. There were village-boys whom I often saw hanging about the store and the tavern whom I did not consider fit associates for my own boys, and I dreaded to take mine where they might fall into such companionship.

"'They must keep away from such fellows,' said John, when I spoke of my fears to him. 'Of course they can find bad company enough if they are willing to get into it or if we are foolish enough to let them. Silas Gregg says two of the hardest drinkers in the place are two young fellows not much but boys.'

"John repeated the statement carelessly, as we so often mention such facts in regard to others. He did not think of it as in any way concerning

us, but I, mother-like, began to brood over it and to reflect upon possible dangers to my own boys. If our removal to the village should be the means of throwing them into such associations and temptations, what compensation would money be? What if I should live to see my sons become like those two of whom John had spoken? Then I turned my restless head on its pillow and tried to banish such visions. I called myself foolish and over-anxious.

"'Little danger of their becoming anything like that, when we never even have liquor in the house, common as it is around us,' I said, impatient of my own fancies. Then, suddenly, as if some voice had spoken it, came the thought, 'Yes, yours will be safe and you can do a profitable business by making other mothers' boys into drunkards. That is what distilleries are for.' I could not sleep; I could not shake off that thought, and it clung to me all the next day.

"My husband talked cheerfully of our new plans and the children were full of anticipations, but I said little. I knew that the view of the matter which so troubled me would be ridiculed as morbid and unreasonable; I myself half believed it to be so, but I could not get rid of it. I tried

to reason it down. I argued that the business we were undertaking was honest and right, and that we were not responsible for the abuse and the vices of others. It was useless; my eyes had been opened, and I could not reason myself back to my old standpoint. At last I could hold my peace no longer, and I told John what was troubling me. He laughed at me, reasoned with me, did everything but agree with me, and then, naturally enough, he grew impatient of what he considered mere nonsense.

"'You are worried and overworked, Molly, or you never would have taken up such a notion,' he said. 'When you get fairly settled in the village and are rested, you will not see things in any such light. Any way, it is too late to repent now. The bargain with Silas is made, all but drawing up the papers, and it wouldn't be honorable to break my word and disappoint him. I can see a great deal more wrong in that than in running a distillery, and so would most people. Even if I didn't think it right to sell people liquor to drink, that would be no argument against owning a distillery. Liquor is used for other purposes than drink—for medicines and in a great many ways—and we are only going to make it; we are not responsible for what

anybody may do with it afterward. But there is no use in talking, Molly: it isn't a case of conscience with you, it is only a case of dyspepsia and overwork; and the sooner we leave here, the better it will be for you.'

"I remember so well what John said, because it was often repeated not only by him, but also by myself, for I tried to believe it. But my eyes had been opened and would not close again. The more I studied the subject, the more I saw of the evil of intemperance, the ruin and woe that it brings.

"We went to the village, and the business prospered from the first. I do not know whether Satan always keeps his promise to give the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them to those whom he tempts into his service with that offer, but I do know that he has kept it with us. That is the story of the fortune that the newspapers ascribe to business enterprise. People said we were doing well; John said so too, and comforts and luxuries came to our village home such as the little farmhouse had never known. I liked all these things, of course, but I could not take the pleasure in them that I had felt in the old days. Still, everything prospered. The business grew, the distillery was enlarged, another one was built.

"One day I was out riding with an acquaintance. We had stopped for a minute at a store; a woman came up to the carriage and asked for some money. She was ragged, dirty and had a red, bloated face that was anything but attractive, and we refused the gift she asked. As she was turning away I remarked to my friend that it would be no charity to place money in such hands. Low as my voice was, the woman caught the words and turned in an instant, her bleared eyes blazing, her whole form trembling, while she shook her fist at me:

"'Ye'll say that, will ye? The likes of you! What's the matter with me hands only that they're emptied of all they ought to hold to fill yours the fuller? Money and clothes, the bread out of me children's mouths, their decent home and mother—yes, and their very souls, for aught I know—have gone into your old distillery. How long would it run if the likes of me didn't feed it? There's where your silks and laces, your fine house and carriage, come from, my lady. You to talk about charity! The devil must laugh to hear ye. Sure, it would be no charity, but bare decent honesty, to give a little of the money you're using back where it belongs—back to the children that's been robbed, and the wives and the mothers. That's where your

finery comes from, and I wonder it don't burn ye while ye wear it.'

"It did. I felt a wild longing to get home and to put away out of my sight and remembrance every elegant article of dress I possessed. My friend said something about 'the impudence of the wretched creature,' but I knew that, whatever the woman might be, she had spoken the truth. From that time forward I shunned everything like display and felt far more shame than pride in every luxury that came to my home. I could not convince my husband; he said I had thought on that one subject until I had become a monomaniac. He had no sympathy with what he called my 'hobby.' The boys, growing older and taking more and more interest in the business, naturally shared their father's views. I ceased talking about it; it was of no use. That was the evil it wrought in my family: we grew apart. Not in real affection and kindness, of course, but in our views, our interests, our sympathies. But if I could not talk, I prayed. Oh what years of prayer they have been! and still there is no answer."

The gray head dropped upon the thin hands, but Barbara said nothing; she had nothing to say even to herself out of her whirl of thoughts.

In a moment the voice, a little broken, took up its story:

"Everything prospered; everything John touched turned to gold. I longed for reverses, losses—anything that would force him into another path—but there was only continued success. Then, one day, my husband dropped in the midst of it all—paralysis, the doctor said—and was brought to his home never to leave it again. For weeks he lay there, helpless, almost motionless, able to speak but little and very imperfectly, yet conscious, I was sure. His eyes followed me about the room, and sometimes smiled into mine in almost the dear old way, though the poor drawn lips could make little sign. There was time for thought in those weeks, and I am sure—yes, *sure*—that things looked different to him then, and that he tried to tell me so. But it was hard to understand what the stiffened tongue tried to utter. I, who was with him all the time, and who learned to understand the broken words and the half-articulated sounds, know that he spoke of the old farm and regretted that he had left it. 'Sorry,' 'wrong;' he spoke these words oftener than any other. And once, when Bradley was in the room, he fixed his eyes on him so earnestly, as if he were struggling with all his soul to

tell him something, and said more plainly than anything else we had heard him speak, 'Give—up. Give—it—up.' Yes, I knew what he meant, and it was some comfort to know that he saw it clearly at the last. But the others did not think so; they attached no meaning to the fragmentary utterances and doubted whether he had retained any consciousness of his condition or his surroundings.

"By my husband's will, executed months before, liberal provision was made for me, but it was all in the way of shares and interests inextricably bound up in the business. He could 'trust the boys to take care of mother and her property,' he said; and he was right: they have always been kind. I think it was because of my feeling against the business there that the boys invested in other enterprises here and that Bradley removed here. Everything they have undertaken has prospered, but it is that money—that money with the mark of the beast upon it—that runs through it all. It seemed to me at first that I could not receive the share of it—the constantly increasing amount—that each year brings to me; but to refuse it was only to put so much more capital back into the business I hate, and so I take it and try to return it, if not to the persons, at least to the class, to

which it belongs—to the poor and ignorant and helpless, especially to those whom the liquor traffic has harmed or defrauded. I cannot share in the wealth and the luxury that have come to the family. I have tried to estimate what the old farm might have been worth if we had remained on it and had been tolerably prosperous until the time John died, and what my share of that, judiciously invested, might have become. So much as that I am willing to call my own, and on that—well, and some little extra I can earn—I live. The rest that comes to me I try to give back to the wretched and the miserable who are its rightful owners. But how can a mother wash her hands of guilt that clings to those of her children? I have so waited, hoped and prayed for a better day to come, but it has been so long! Oh, my boys! my boys!"

CHAPTER X.

UNTO CÆSAR—UNTO GOD.

IN her own room Barbara leaned back in her easy-chair, her hands dropped idly in her lap, and a troubled look was in her eyes. She wished —it was cowardly, she knew, but in her first tumult of thought she did wish it—that she had been left in her ignorant content, that this story had never reached her. Far back in her life and so seldom recalled that it had been almost forgotten was something that sprang into startling vividness now. She remembered gazing with childish, wondering eyes into a white, anguished face—her mother's face; of being caught up suddenly at the sound of a step, hurried into another room and the door closed and locked. She could feel the trembling of the arms that held her and the tumultuous beating of the heart against which she hid her face in fright, while from the other room came sounds of overturned furniture, of heavy, unsteady steps, of an angry hand pounding on the closed door and a

voice thick with abuse and threatening demanding that it should be opened. She remembered, also, another day when men brought slowly into the house a rigid and motionless form: thrown by a runaway horse, they said. Afterward, when the same form, shrouded in white, lay in the darkened room, Aunt Cass had said—it was Barbara's first distinct remembrance of Aunt Cass—that it was "the best thing that could have happened." But Barbara remembered that when she was lifted up to look for the last time at the still face a longing for the father who had played with her and carried her on his shoulder mingled strongly in her childish heart with a sense of relief that the folded hands never could strike again. There was another grave in a few short months: the broken-hearted mother was gone, and Barbara was left to Aunt Cass's care.

No one in all the years since had spoken to Barbara of this first page of her life or had strengthened its hold upon her by allusion or explanation. Aunt Cass disapproved of the liquor traffic—"though not in any ill-bred or fanatical way, of course," as she would have hastened to add—and that very decorous disapproval, supplemented by her dim memory of the past, constituted Bar-

bara's education on the temperance question. But she knew, when she began to think of it now, that it was a question upon which she had a very decided opinion, and that it was this which had brought the first wild desire to escape from the new knowledge which had come to her.

But, whatever knowledge is thrust upon us, we cannot unknow it at will, and Barbara, who had so determined to have done with all shams and to live a life that was "real through and through," would not really have chosen to remain ignorant, even though what she had learned cast a sudden shadow over all the brightness of her new home. Never before since she had been its mistress had she entered this room of hers without a keen appreciation of its prettiness, a luxurious sense of ownership in its dainty and perfect appointments, but now they oppressed her and hurt her. Were they all bought at such a fearful price? Then she tried to shake off the weight that burdened her:

"How foolish I am! Doubtless the story has quite another side, which Bradley will tell me as soon as I ask him, and will laugh at all my worry. Mother Holland may have brooded over that one thing that so troubled her at first until, as her husband said, she has become almost a monomaniac.

Poor mother! I understand it all now—the strangeness over which people have wondered, and which they have so misrepresented. I will talk to Bradley about it; if there is any distillery yet, he will make it all right, I am sure."

But talking with Colonel Holland on the subject was not quite so easy as Barbara had planned. He laughed at her, indeed, pitied her, said she had been imprisoned in the house with her lame foot until everything looked as distorted and out of proportion as the poor foot itself; but he begged of her "not to adopt mother's hobby:" it "wasn't a comfortable one," and it wouldn't "carry double gracefully." Then, as Barbara persisted, he had answered more seriously, though with a touch of impatience:

"Really, Barbara, I don't see why you should bestow so much thought upon the matter. You know mother's—peculiarities. There was a distillery, to be sure, and it was my father's first business venture; that is equally true. But all that was years ago, and you must know that such an establishment in a small village is a very insignificant item in all the merchandise, importing and other business which my brother and I carry on, and which has been, and is, the source of our wealth."

"Do you yet own the distillery?" asked Barbara, after a moment's pause.

"Yes, but we would have sold it long ago—partly because of mother's feeling about it, partly because we did not care to keep it—if mother had been willing. That's the strangest part of it: she would not consent to our disposing of it. She has an interest in it, you know, and we could give no clear title without her consent."

"I do not believe she fully understood you; I'm sure she did not," cried Barbara, eagerly. "She so wants to be rid of it all that I think such an offer would delight her. Will you do it still, Bradley? May I tell her? Oh, I think it would take away this burden that has troubled her for years."

But Colonel Holland did not share his wife's hopefulness. There was a moment's silence, and then his answer came slowly and with some apparent constraint:

"Of course you may tell her, my dear, but I do not think you quite comprehend how morbid she is on that subject. All you can say will not make any difference."

Colonel Holland's faithlessness did not dishearten Barbara. She seized the first quiet hour with her

mother-in-law the next day to repeat the conversation and her message. The sad eyes met hers tenderly, but they did not brighten :

"No, dear. I know how it seems to you at first glance, but I have thought of it so long, you see, that I have studied it from all sides. There are many other enterprises now, but the money that made them possible came from there. The stream has grown wide since, but that does not change the fountain. And that is not all : the ships from over the sea bring liquor, the great warehouses store it. There is much other business, indeed, but the poison runs through in many ways. No, I did not care to have the distillery sold ; it would only bring so much more cankered gold to go into something else, and the dreadful manufacturing would still be carried on with no whit of the stain or the responsibility removed from us, except, perhaps, to blinded human eyes. Besides, it may be—it's been so long, but still I pray and hope—that a change will come some time ; and if the distillery goes out of our hands the power of stopping its work goes also. I do not want it sold ; I want it destroyed."

Barbara had nothing to urge. What a tangle it all was, this web which in her girlish ignorance she

had thought to straighten so easily! Her husband did not inquire the result of her effort—it is possible that he did not care to renew conversation upon that topic—but she told him, and then, as he was silent, she suggested rather timidly,

"Bradley, you could afford to destroy that old—mill?"

"And several more as valuable, I suppose, if by 'afford' you mean doing it without serious embarrassment financially. But what would be the use? My mother has some absurd notions that have grown stronger with her years, as old people's notions are apt to do, and the best way to make her comfortable, as we can't entirely overturn the world, is to fix her mind on something else and not discuss such topics with her. And now, my dear, do drop business and cease to bother your brains with trying to understand about its ins and its outs. I'll attend to that part, and you shall have the results. Isn't that a fair division of labor? The world of trade is just as real as any other—rather more real to most of us, in fact—but it isn't conducted on New-Jerusalem principles, as good old ladies like my mother and transcendentalists like John Kent think it ought to be. I really cannot help that. But if you are going to de-

velop any such morbid sentimentality, I shall drop everything at once and take you to Europe."

Half in jest, half in earnest, the words were, but with a certain decision underlying them all which made Barbara feel the uselessness of further argument or remonstrance.

"Who is John Kent?" she asked, presently, less from curiosity than to break the awkward silence.

"A distant relative—second or third cousin. His father had some small interest in my father's venture when we moved from the farm to the village, but he died while John was a little fellow. When John grew up, he found that what his father had invested was so entangled in the business that he couldn't get it 'unspotted,' as he called it, and he washed his hands of all of it. I don't know where he is now—in some country-place, probably, poor as poverty and preaching his impracticable goodness to people as poor as himself."

Tone and words jarred, but Barbara made no comment. The sweet cup so lately raised to her lips held its drops of bitterness, after all.

With that day the glamour of Barbara's new possessions disappeared. Aunt Cass, who came for a long visit and noted with the keen eyes of an appraiser all the elegance about her, secretly

wondered that Barbara should so soon have familiarized herself with luxury as to evince not the slightest sign of elation even while she gratified to the utmost her aunt's desire to see and to enjoy.

"One would think the girl had been accustomed to such lavishness all her life, and found it a trifle wearisome rather than otherwise," the aunt commented to herself. "If she had only developed such simplicity of taste while I had to provide for her— However, we couldn't have afforded it, for every one would have suspected that it was a matter of necessity, and not of choice. But Mrs. Colonel Holland is wealthy enough to do as she chooses, and I must say her simple style is very becoming to her. It has an aristocratic old-family air about it, and anything is better than a suggestion of vulgar newness. Well, no one can say that I haven't done well by Barbara," she concluded, complacently. "It is not probable that her own mother would have secured for her so comfortable an establishment."

But to the young mistress of this comfortable establishment had come a world of new thoughts. Her girlish prayer for a "real life" had been suddenly answered in a way unexpected, undesired.

The reality pained and saddened her, but it must needs be taken up, and with the knowledge of it the last temptation to a merely fashionable, pleasure-seeking existence vanished. She did not again attempt to discuss with her husband the topic that had proved so distasteful to him, but the enforced silence made her think of it only the more deeply. The old memory, unrecalled so long, grew strong and tenacious, and the conviction she had been scarcely conscious of possessing deepened and took firm root. There was before her a definite object to be accomplished; toward that she must live and work.

Then, one quiet Sabbath morning in the early spring, when three or four persons stood before the altar of Grace church to take the oath of allegiance to a new Master, Barbara Holland was one of them. Mrs. Ellis nodded her bright head well satisfied, but in Colonel Holland's home there was a gray head bowed in still deeper thanksgiving:

"Two at last! 'If two of you shall agree as touching anything that ye shall ask—' Ah, Lord, is this the beginning of thine answer? And I thought her coming would but bar the door more hopelessly! Two to pray for them now. O

Father, hear thou the prayer in heaven thy dwelling-place; and when thou hearest, forgive!"

Yet the agreement between the two was a tacit one; there were but few words about it. Only, that evening, when Barbara turned from the piano, where she had been softly playing, and Laurence had left her side—in those days the boy had a fashion of lingering about his young stepmother—the elder lady said,

"Do you remember that old story of the taking of Jericho? I have been thinking about it to-day—how Joshua, looking at the high, strong wall, did not recognize the 'Captain of the Lord's host,' but viewed him as a probable enemy. We so often make that mistake and fancy hindrance and danger when the Lord is sending help. That is the way I thought of you, my dear; I did not know you for one of his messengers."

"I did not know myself," answered Barbara, with a smile that ended in a sigh as she added, "The walls are high and strong, surely."

"I don't see how you two people know what you are talking about; I don't," remarked Laurence, with saucy freedom. He had not wandered farther away than the tempting cushions in an alcove, where he lay stretched at full length in luxurious

idleness. "Tell me that story about Jericho, Mater Barbara, will you not? I know it's somewhere in the Bible, but I know a good deal more about old Troy; and that's not being overwhelmingly familiar with Troy, either."

Barbara looked at the bright boyish face turned laughingly toward her. She was growing very fond of Laurence, and had dropped into a half-motherly, half-sisterly relation to him which was probably the best she could have assumed. Much authority over the boy of fourteen she could scarcely have had, but she was beginning to see that she might have almost boundless influence. When she first came he had simply called her "Mrs. Holland," until his father, more sharply than he often spoke to Laurence, reminded him that she was his mother. After that, for a time, he skillfully avoided any title whatever, but of late he had, to use his own version of the matter, "compromised on the maternal cognomen" by giving Barbara its equivalent in every language in which he could learn it, with additions and variations of his own. It suited Barbara. She shrank from the gravely-uttered name, and felt that these playful titles expressed their relationship more correctly; there were friendliness and comradeship about them.

How much Laurence found to interest him in the siege of Jericho, Barbara could judge only by an occasional question and the eyes intently fixed upon her face. He was silent for a few minutes at its conclusion, and then abruptly remarked, as if some one had made a proposition,

"If you take a class of boys in that Grace Sunday-school, marmar, I don't know as I mind going."

And that was the beginning of a new work for Barbara.

Laurence's announcements were apt to be sudden. The day after his school closed for the summer vacation, when he had noisily dropped his strapful of books in the hall, he startled the dinner-table by observing,

"And now I want to go out to Kitty's for my vacation."

"Kitty's?" repeated his father and his stepmother in chorus, the former in astonishment, the latter inquiringly.

"Yes, our Kitty—Kitty Wilder's. She seemed to think it was a very mopy sort of a place she was going to; but when she told me about it, I knew it was just the kind I'd like, and I told her I'd come—parental tyranny permitting, of course."

"You did?" said his father, amused. "Did she invite you?"

"Well"—Laurence paused to reflect—"I don't remember exactly what she did say, but I'm pretty sure she expects me. She didn't say she didn't want me. Why, of course she does! She knows I wouldn't be any bother."

"She will find herself an exceedingly deluded young woman if she believes anything of the kind," laughed his father. "What do you propose to busy yourself with? And what sort of a place is it? I have really forgotten what Kitty's home is like—if I ever knew."

"Oh," answered Laurence, "it's a quiet little village—dull, she called it—with plenty of woods near it, and nice places to fish, and an old mill. I want to fish."

On the whole, it was not a bad plan for the boy's vacation, Colonel Holland thought. A quiet country-place where he could live out of doors, and where some one knew him well enough to look after him a little, would be admirable. So consent was given with the good-natured indulgence that met most of Laurence's requests.

Only the grandmother thought of any objection, and she had so long accustomed herself to no voice

in the family council that she hesitated before she spoke:

"Are you sure it will be convenient for Kitty, Bradley? She would be glad to see Laurence, I know, but she lives with her grandfather, you remember, and her sister, and the family are not in very easy circumstances, I believe. It might trouble them."

"Oh, they have a comfortable farm, haven't they? I really never knew anything of any of the family but Kitty," he explained as he met his wife's eyes. "Well, that part of it can easily be arranged. I'll write to Kitty.—Thank you for the suggestion, mother."

It pleased Bradley that his mother had made the suggestion. Certainly she seemed less sad and abstracted lately. He said so to his wife as they passed out of the room together, and repeated the words that were still sweet to hear, though they could not now hold the meaning she had once attached to them:

"You are doing wonders, Barbara."

CHAPTER XI.

A BOARDER.

KITTY looked curiously at the letter Dick dropped beside her plate at breakfast. It bore the familiar postmark, but that bold, business-like address promised nothing from Angie Bates; and, indeed, that correspondence had sadly languished of late. Then a flash of recognition came, and she exclaimed as she tore open the envelope,

"From Cousin Bradley!"

Kitty's first thought was of an invitation for the summer—to go to the mountains with them, perhaps, or to the seashore—she quite forgetting that the new Mrs. Holland did not even know her, and that the colonel would be the last person to think of such a thing. The only wonder was that he had not entirely forgotten her in the months of her absence. His letter speedily disclosed why he had not, but he had really managed his somewhat delicate communication very well:

"DEAR KITTY: I do not know what romances of rural life you may have repeated to Laurence, but you seem to have fascinated him, and now that school is over he is anxious to make a descent upon you with fishing-tackle, game-bags and I know not what besides. He says Kitty is 'expecting' him for a visit—which I very much doubt; and even if it were so, I would not consent that your fears should be realized. But if your sister—she is the housekeeper, is she not?—will kindly agree to receive him as a boarder for a few weeks, and if you can look after him a little, I shall really consider his plan an admirable one: the country will be good for him and I shall feel safe about him. I know it is asking a good deal, for a schoolboy like Laurence, just set free for vacation, is something of a cyclone to introduce into a quiet family. If you think his presence will in any way disturb your grandfather or prove inconvenient to your sister or yourself, do not feel the slightest hesitation in letting me know, and I will turn his enthusiasm in some other direction."

Kitty's eyes hastily ran over the page, and then she read it aloud.

"Is he particularly noisy or troublesome?" ques-

tioned Petra, rather doubtfully, after a moment's surprised silence.

"No more so than any other boy. That is only Cousin Bradley's way of making us understand that if he comes at all it must be as a boarder."

Petra's brown face flushed a little. She suddenly remembered that her sister had been an inmate of this man's home for years, and it seemed only natural and right that her family should receive his son as a welcome visitor for as long a time as he chose to stay. Still, there was the old problem of making ends meet. It did not seem possible with such a guest all summer.

"I don't see how we can do it," she concluded as she explained her feelings to Kitty.

"It's good of you to think of it in that way," answered Kitty, with one of the little stirrings of appreciation which now and then of late she discovered in herself toward Petra. The girl who worked in the mill and who knew nothing of the world of "society" did have some views and sentiments worth recognizing.

"I know Cousin Bradley, though, and he will never think of any interchange of hospitalities or any such feeling as you have about it; he only views me as an experiment of Cousin Helen's."



A Letter from Cousin Bradley. Page 190.

There was a touch of bitterness in the last words, but Petra's eyes, with some perplexity in them, were watching Kitty, and she hurried on to safer ground:

"Of course we will send a cordial invitation, but he will insist on having his own way; which is just as well, since we can't afford any other way, and so we may as well take the comfort of it. I'll be glad to see Laurence again."

Petra drew a breath of relief. Such a boarder, with Colonel Holland's ideas of remuneration, would bring a not uncomfortable addition to the family income, and, since Kitty viewed the matter so favorably and promised to see to putting a room in order for the new-comer, the letter which at first had appeared formidable grew into a bit of sunshine.

As for Kitty, she quite enjoyed her little work of preparation. It was only Laurence who was coming, and he was too healthfully and wholly a boy to be critical or fastidious about his belongings. He would be blissfully unconscious of many things that older eyes might see, and so his presence would not trouble her, and it would be like a breath from the old life. She had both taste and ingenuity, and her skillful fingers, with a little

drawing from her own store of pretty trifles, contrived, without making any great changes in the room she had selected, to give it quite a different air. She had done very little of this work of transformation in her home; she had not thought it worth while.

Yet in some ways Kitty had gained a good deal in the months that had passed. Her school at the cross-roads had not been conducted in the martyr-like, purposeless way in which she had first thought of applying for a place as teacher. Her encounter with Mary Jane Griggs and Mr. Barton's terrible "fundamentals" had awakened her to the fact that even this little post could not be held carelessly. Moreover, her pride had been touched by her first defeat, and she had resolved to show Mr. Barton and several other people that success as a teacher did not entirely depend upon a head filled with horrid figures and outlandish places. There was a goodly store of determination in Kitty's character, untrained though it had been. She was fertile in expedients and winning in manner. She was wise enough to study along the line where she had discovered her deficiency, and, altogether, Kitty was growing quite popular in the small kingdom of Cross Creek. She was really finding consider-

able satisfaction, too, in her work and its progress, though she had not acknowledged so much even to herself. She fancied that she was still very miserable; only, of course, she had not so much time to think about it now. One who had been quick to note and heartily to praise her success was Mr. Kent, but his commendation always brought a flush to Kitty's cheek and a guilty feeling to her heart. With all her fondness for admiration, she shrank from the minister's cordial friendliness.

"Because it isn't me that he really likes at all; I know it isn't. He only likes the mistake that he made and never found out," she said to herself.

Yet the very throb of humiliation held in it the promise of better things than Kitty had yet known. Mr. Kent's remark that her sister was "carrying burdens too heavy for her" had also recurred to Kitty many times since that day, and had caused her to notice Petra more closely than else she might have done. As a result the money she earned was added to the common fund instead of being spent upon herself, and so became really a help. It was because of the closer notice, too, that she discovered how her sister liked to take up the books she was studying and occasionally asked questions about them, and something of the tact she was learning

in her school-work guided her in her answers and induced her to leave the right books where they could be found when wanted.

Still, when Kitty had finished putting Laurence's room in order, the smile with which she surveyed it ended in a sigh. Laurence would be sure to like it all the better because it was so different from the luxurious apartments at home. The novelty would please his boyish fancy for the little time he was to stay; but even if it were not for a little while, he would not care: such things did not matter much to boys—the things that meant all the comfort of life to her. If only she and Laurence could change places!

The "Barracks" and its surroundings certainly did not depress Laurence as it had Kitty upon her return. He pronounced it a "jolly old place" upon the first view, and proceeded to get a fuller view as rapidly as possible by wandering in doors and out, from the house to the well, the barn and the orchard. Kitty's grandfather struck him in the light of an unexpected prize: a man not too busy to sit still and tell a boy about the best places to fish, what kind of bait to use and what country nooks were worth visiting was a treasure indeed. He expected great things from Dick, too.

Dick in his secret heart had not been at all sure that he liked the proposed invasion of his domain by "that youngster from town," as he privately called Laurence, but he was not proof against the cheery greeting that met him at the gate the first evening after Laurence's arrival:

"Hello, Dick! You *are* Dick, ain't you? I've been waiting for you to come."

Kitty, as she watched Laurence throwing himself in his hearty, unspoiled way into all the new occupations and amusements that offered—the same merry boyish Laurence as of old—wondered what changes had come to his home with its new mistress. She wondered, but would not ask, and only little by little gained a knowledge of some things that surprised her.

One day a too persistent following of Dick about the "garden-patch," as Grandpa Wilder called the ground that Dick was industriously trying to cultivate, and a long walk up the river afterward, resulted in a slight illness. Kitty, remembering that she had been requested to look after Laurence a little, proposed bringing a glass of elderberry wine from the cellar for him to take as a dose of medicine.

"No, *sir!*" cried Laurence, starting up from his

recumbent position on the lounge. "No, ma'am, I mean, but with the emphasis all the same."

"Why, Laurence, it isn't hard to take," said Kitty, laughing at his earnestness. "It is something that Grandma Wilder made herself, and is really very pleasant—just a kind of wine, you know."

"That's the trouble; I don't want any wine," persisted Laurence. "What was the name of that missionary who stayed so many years at his post without seeing a single heathen converted, and then at last they were swept in by crowds? I ought to remember his name, for he is one of the fellows I have been hearing about lately. But, any way, something like that is what has happened to our house. After all these years grandma has succeeded in gaining two converts—Mother Barbara and myself."

Kitty did not understand. Grandma Holland's queer notions were more than she had ever attempted to fathom. Of course they were queer, since everybody said so, and since they kept her from doing as other people did.

"Well," she said, after a moment of astonishment, "you may have reached the point of refusing elderberry wine, but I think you will be a long

time in learning to refuse everything that Grandma Holland does. I surely hope so."

"I mean about wine and all such things. She doesn't believe in drinking it or making it or selling it, and neither do I," declared Laurence, stoutly. "Only," he added, with a sudden shadowing of his bright young face, "I can't see how it is all going to come out. Everything is so mixed!"

"And how came you to think so much about it?" asked Kitty, curiously.

"Oh, I heard them talking—Grandma and Mamma B.—and a fellow can't help thinking now and then when he has nothing better to do."

Instruction on such subjects as total abstinence and missions was a new turn for Laurence's education to take, and Kitty said so.

Laurence laughed:

"Oh, that's Mother Barbara too. I've sort of imbibed all I know about missions and such things; it isn't much. She goes to societies, you know, and writes papers, and I get interested sometimes. Her eyes shine so when she talks, and she never picks out the poky parts to tell me. I wish she would come out here; she'd like it, I know."

It was evident that Laurence had learned to care a good deal for his stepmother in a familiar, young-

er-brotherly-love way, and the fact that he had been allowed to assume such a relationship greatly changed Kitty's prejudices and fancies concerning the new mistress of Holland Place. Still, she was thankful that there was no probability of Mrs. Holland ever wishing to visit the Barracks.

Laurence enjoyed himself: the long days by the river-side or in the woods, the spare hours with Dick, Grandpa Wilder's country lore and the walk to Kitty's school all suited him. His was a hearty appetite, mental as well as physical, and easily pleased with whatever came to hand. He had grown to seem like one of the family, when, one day, he suddenly startled Kitty by an announcement:

"Uncle Clinton is coming to-morrow."

"'Uncle Clinton'? Clinton Holland? Coming here?"

Something in Kitty's short, amazed questions and in the look on her face as she dropped the books from her hand made Laurence explain wonderingly in his turn:

"Not to stay, of course; only just to stop over a train, he says. He is on his way to our house, and papa wanted him to stop and see how I am getting along—whether I am behaving myself, he

very politely puts it. He will come on the ten-o'clock express, I suppose, and go at half-past six. Why, it will not be any bother, will it? You needn't mind Uncle Clint; I can take care of him while you are at school."

Kitty recovered her self-possession sufficiently to laugh:

"I was only surprised; I haven't seen him in a long time. He will find you getting along very comfortably, will he not?"

Then Kitty took up her books again and started on her schoolward walk, but her brain was in a whirl. It was all very well for Laurence to say that she need not mind: much he knew about it! Clinton Holland was the last person in the world whom Kitty wanted to see—or, rather, to be seen by—in that shabby old house with her present surroundings. In his occasional visits at his brother's house he had appeared to her girlish fancy a very model of elegance. He was younger than Bradley, but several years older than herself, and, as she was nearly always at school, she had not been very well acquainted with him. But Angie Bates had informed her that ladies—"real young ladies out in society"—pronounced him "delightful, but so fastidious!" and altogether Kitty had greatly ad-

mired him in her schoolgirlish way. The thought that Laurence's coming might bring any other member of the family, least of all this one, had never occurred to her, and all her old pride, discontent with her position and disgust for her home and its belongings awoke with the prospect.

"I wish he would stay away. Oh dear! I wish I were not here myself. How everything will look to him!"

The only thing to be done, however, was to make the best of it, and, though Kitty bitterly declared to herself that there was no "best," she began to plan feverishly. The next day was a holiday, fortunately, and she should not be required to leave him, as had been so obligingly suggested, to the care of Laurence—Laurence, who would be sure to take him everywhere he ought not to go, and to hunt up as a special object of interest everything that one would not want seen. She would get up a nice little lunch if it took every penny she owned, and the table could be made respectable with grandma's old linen and china. Dick and Pete would not be home then, and she was glad of it.

"Well, I am!" she assured herself, defiantly, as she recognized that thought. "Dick is only a boy,

but he is just as well away. And Pete! What would he think of her being a common mill-girl? And Pete would just as calmly tell him where she had been if any question or remark called it out as if that horrid place were a queen's palace. If only he were going away a little earlier, I might manage it so that he would go without that precious bit of knowledge."

Why not so arrange it even as matters were? Why need Clinton meet Pete at all, or Dick, either? Grandpa would be there, of course, but old people were expected to have homely, old-fashioned ways. Kitty would get him to talking about the village as it was in the days when those old derricks were put up. Grandpa talked well about old times, and it was rather interesting. Then, as soon as lunch was over, she could propose a walk to view the deserted wells, and from there they could go to the little cave in the woods which was Laurence's favorite nook. That would please Laurence, prevent any long stay in the house and keep them all busy until time to return for an early tea. It really ought to be an earlier tea than usual, to give their guest ample time to reach his train. That would be a sufficient reason for not waiting for the family.

"That is exactly what I will do," decided Kitty, with a determined nod of her head.

But when, at evening, Kitty told Petra of the expected arrival, there seemed for a moment some danger that her plan for entertaining the guest might be frustrated.

"It is very probable that you may not see him; for if he goes away at half-past six, we ought to have tea for him a little earlier than we have our own tea. But you will not mind that, I suppose?" concluded Kitty, with well-assumed carelessness.

"Perhaps I may be able to come home earlier to-morrow," answered unconscious Pete. "It is quite likely that I may; they are not hurried in the packing-room now. Not that I particularly care to see Mr. Holland," she added, with a faint smile; "only if it would be any more convenient or pleasanter for you—"

"Oh, I wouldn't bother," interposed Kitty, hurriedly, her heart throbbing with a sensation of mingled guilt and vexation. "He will be here but a few hours, and it is only Laurence whom he really comes to see, you know. He does not care to see us. I wouldn't take the least trouble about it if I were you."

Kitty felt that at least the last sentence was quite honest, and Petra, a trifle surprised at this sudden indifference to one of the persons whose doings and goings Kitty usually regarded as of great importance, was glad that nothing remarkable was expected of her, and dropped the subject with a quiet monosyllable:

"Well!"

CHAPTER XII.

WHAT FELL WITH THE WALLS.

IT is not often that circumstances will run smoothly in the groove human hands mark out for them, but everything really appeared to be doing so the next day, and Kitty congratulated herself. A few of her own choice books and engravings scattered here and there wonderfully relieved the barrenness of the great front room, and large vases of the roses that were blooming so luxuriously about the old place lent it color and beauty.

Then, too, Deb was propitious and entered heartily into Kitty's plans for lunch:

"Laws, chile, ye don' s'pose I'se furgot how to cook? De Wilders was de kind to set good tables in de ole days. Nebber ye fear; git ole Deb 'nuff to cook, an' tings'll be all right."

Deb kept her promise royally, and Kitty's anxious eyes brightened as they scanned the table. Grandpa was in his best array, his gray hair smoothly brushed and a white handkerchief sub-

stituted for the bandanna—what would he not do to please Kitty?—and a slight suggestion landed him safely on the desired topic. It was one in which Mr. Holland had an intelligent interest, and altogether the hour flew swiftly. Then Kitty delicately contrived that Laurence should propose the walk. It was a delightful day, and the soft air and the bright sunlight seemed to invite one out of doors; so that part of the programme followed naturally. Only over the old man's face passed a flitting shadow of disappointment. He had so enjoyed the talk, the wandering back to old times with an appreciative listener, that he had begun to look forward to a pleasant afternoon; but he relinquished the prospect with a patient little sigh as Kitty came down stairs with hat and gloves.

Laurence was in high spirits. He told of the good times he was having and of the number of fish he had caught, and the fastidious uncle Clinton manifested a keener sympathy in all these things, Kitty thought, than she could have believed possible. It seemed to her that his manner was more gentle, his courtesy more simple and hearty, than she had thought them when she saw him in town.

"I am glad Bradley let the boy come out here this summer," he said as Laurence walked a little

in advance—"that is, if he is not a trouble to you. Bradley feared that he might be inconveniencing you in some way by so long a stay—you or your sister, I think he said? That was why he wished me to stop. By the way, I have not seen your sister, Miss Kitty."

"She is not at home to-day," answered Kitty, her face flushing. "No; Laurence is no trouble. He likes things—just as they are," hesitating a little over the close of her sentence.

"Why shouldn't he? Such a simple country life is by far the most healthful one for a boy. I know I enjoyed it myself, and I often pity children who are condemned to grow up in a city."

Laurence dropped back again, in his hand a sprig of wild vine which promised well for the coming blackberry-crop, and the conversation once more turned into a safe channel. Kitty resolved to keep it there, and talked gayly, though with a little feverish flush on her cheek, on every topic which suggested itself. Through it all she kept an anxious watch on sun and shadow, and was the only one of the trio who hailed with secret relief every indication that the afternoon was waning. She greatly feared, when their long ramble brought them back to the homeward road only half a mile from

the medicine-factory, that something would remind Laurence of the fact and of Petra; but it chanced that the turn in the road found Uncle Clinton in the midst of an interesting recital, and the boy was oblivious of everything else. Only a little while longer now and the dreaded day would be over—"respectably over, without being any more humiliating than was necessary," Kitty said to herself.

Suddenly through the sweet country quiet of the summer afternoon came a sound like the firing of a heavy cannon; it shook the earth around, and was instantly followed by a crash, dying away in a long rumbling noise that could not have been all echo.

"What was that?" exclaimed Laurence as involuntarily the trio paused and looked at one another.

"It couldn't have been thunder?" said Kitty, half questioningly, her glance sweeping the clear sky.

"No; it did not sound like that. Is there any mining or tunneling going on anywhere in the neighborhood? It was more like the noise of blasting rock. It must have been an explosion of some sort."

Laurence shook his head decidedly:

"No, Uncle Clinton; there is no such work go-

ing on anywhere around here, or I should have known it. I'm sure of that."

"You must have been keeping a careful oversight in this vicinity," laughed his uncle. "Well, then we must call it an earthquake, I suppose, or wait for time to reveal the mystery."

The time required was not long. But a short distance had been walked when the clattering of a horse's hoofs was heard on the road behind, and in a moment appeared an excited rider who called as he swept past,

"The factory has fallen in—the medicine-factory!"

"'Factory'?"

Uncle Clinton, Kitty and Laurence each repeated the word, and then stopped and blankly gazed at one another.

"Any one hurt?" cried Laurence.

But the horseman, if he heard the question, paused for no reply, only turned in his stirrups and shouted back:

"Go and help, or carry the word."

"Pete!" exclaimed Laurence, uttering his first swift thought, but he repented the word as he saw Kitty's blanched face.

"Oh, let us go back!"

The words came with a long shuddering breath, and Mr. Holland began to expostulate:

"Ought you to go?" with a suggestive emphasis on the pronoun. "If you could go home, Laurence and I—"

"Oh, I must go!" Kitty interposed, wildly. "I cannot live and not know whether she is there. Do let us hurry."

Kitty had turned as she spoke; Laurence was beside her, and the visitor followed wonderingly. He offered his arm as he reached Kitty's side, and she took it mechanically, though it seemed as if her flying feet could scarcely keep pace with a steadier step. Casualties were fortunately rare in this quiet place, and this one might involve loss of life as well as loss of property. Still, neither curiosity, humanity nor a blending of the two could quite account for the girl's intense excitement, her companion thought.

Presently another messenger from the scene of disaster came along, and delayed long enough to report a little more clearly what had happened:

"Don't know what started it. Something went wrong in the room where the retorts are—there's always a lot of chemicals there—and the first thing we knew was an awful explosion that tore out the

wall. The next minute the whole west part of the building came crashing down—store-room, packing-room. Any one hurt? My, yes! Nobody knows how many are buried under the walls. There were all the girls, you see, and—"

Kitty's cry of agony checked the speaker. He cast a startled glance at her face and hastily added,

"Well, some got out. It's hard to tell much about it yet. I'm after doctors and help;" and he hurried away.

"It's Pete, you know—Kitty's sister," explained Laurence, in answer to the surprised questioning in his uncle's eyes.

But Mr. Holland had not known, and even yet he did not comprehend:

"Her sister? Was she— Not *here?*"

The tone of amazement stung Kitty even through her anguish, and suddenly flashed before her all the petty cowardice and disloyalty of the day. Was it a question like this that she had so dreaded? Was it only the fear of a glance like this that had made her ashamed of her very sister and ready to disown her? And now the tie she had despised was broken! Her bitter remorse, self-scorn and torturing fear burst forth in her answer:

"Yes, my sister—Petra, my only sister. And

she has worked here because we were poor and needed the money, and there was nothing else for her to do. She was too brave and unselfish to think of herself, and she has always taken the hard places and borne the heavy burdens, while I—I have let her do it, and have been ashamed of her being only a mill-girl. I didn't want you to know. Do you think I care now? I'd tell all the world if I could. —Oh, Pete, Pete! I did love you! I loved you best."

The passionate words broke in a sob. Kitty had withdrawn her hand from the supporting arm in the defiance of her confession, but her companion replaced it with quiet firmness:

"You are taking the worst for granted, Miss Kitty; there is no reason to give up hope yet. We may find your sister safe and unharmed; but if she should be among those to be rescued or cared for, you will need all your strength and self-control. You must be brave and strong if you are to help her or any one."

The calm voice and the reassuring words had their effect. Kitty looked up into Mr. Holland's face and saw not the slightest token that he was shocked at herself or her revelation, and she caught at the hope he held out.

It was but a few minutes before the country road was alive with people. It seemed wonderful that the tidings could have spread so rapidly, but a crowd had already gathered about the building, and other anxious voices were pressing their inquiries for missing friends when Kitty and her companions reached the place. All was confusion, and it was not easy to find any one who could give definite information.

"Girls in the packing-room? Yes'm; I think they were all there when it happened," answered a workman with sleeves rolled above his elbows. His arms were brawny and his hands were strong, but the muscles twitched convulsively as he spoke, and the eyes he turned upon Kitty wore a dazed look, as if he saw another face than hers. "My boy was there, down in the lower room."

The man was eager to be among the workers who were removing the débris, but a companion, an overseer in one of the mill-rooms, pushed him back with a gruff kindliness:

"Wait a bit, Neil; you are not fit for it. They're doing all that can be done as fast as mortal hands can do it. Wait till some one tires out, and you can take his place. It's hard to be still such times, but a man must make use of his

reason and not waste strength that will be needed later on."

The last sentence was addressed to Mr. Holland, and that gentleman seized the opportunity to inquire once more about the inmates of the room in which Petra had been.

"I don't know how many were there to-day. Some of them escaped—three of them. One was pretty badly hurt, but the others were only somewhat bruised. It's a wonder they got out. There is one of them now;" and he pointed to a girl with a bandaged hand standing in the centre of a little group at the outer edge of the crowd. Every one who had been on the spot at the time of the accident was besieged by curious and anxious inquiries.

"Petra Wilder?" She turned at Kitty's question. "Oh yes; she was there. She came to get some fresh paste from my table once this afternoon, I remember, but I don't know where she was at the last; I hadn't noticed her for a while. No, she wasn't with us; there were only three of us that got out. We were near the upper door, and we jumped as the walls began to give way. But I'm afraid it didn't do poor Elsie much good; the doctor can't tell yet how badly she is hurt. I got off the best of all."

Kitty turned away; the final hope was gone now. Somewhere under that crushing weight of rubbish Petra lay dead, or, more terrible still, mangled and suffering.

Laurence looked pityingly at the white face, and then at his uncle:

"If she would only go home!"

But Mr. Holland too well understood the suspense that would not let Kitty rest for a moment away from the scene. He did not ask her to go, but found a seat for her at a little distance, where she could watch the workmen, and shielded her as far as possible from all curious glances and questions. There was no reasonable encouragement to offer, and he would not torture her with vague surmises or efforts at consolation; so, except for the silent sympathy that alone was endurable, she was left to herself.

The time had flown unnoticed, as it always does when eternity breaks in such strange ways into our daily lives. The sun had dropped low behind the hills, but as his light faded prompt hands had kindled huge bonfires that threw a ruddy glare over the scene. Mr. Holland's train had long since swept on its way, but no one thought of it. All interest was centred upon the work of re-

moving the ruins, which was going forward rapidly, yet cautiously also, since any want of care might mean danger to some one buried beneath, or danger to the workers themselves from the parts of the wall yet standing.

Two of the missing ones had been found, and Kitty shuddered at the piteous cry that broke from the friends who claimed them as the lifeless forms were borne away. Would her turn come soon? Her fancy pictured Petra now under this pile of stones, now under those heavy timbers, until it seemed as if she must rush to the spot and herself begin the work of rescue. Then, as she tried to banish such horrible pictures, memory ran back over the day. Oh, if she had only urged Petra to leave the mill earlier, as she had proposed! One loving word of persuasion, a hint that her coming would give pleasure, and she might have been safe.

"But I did not want her, I tried to keep her from coming, and now she will never come again," Kitty whispered, sadly, to herself.

The leaping flames, the strange shadows, the lurid light on busy men and ruined building, recalled to Kitty a night far back in the past when she and Petra, clinging close together,

had watched a burning house. What inseparable companions they had been, that little sister and she, in the old childish days! She remembered how she had shivered in the cold wind, and how Petra had thrown the little red cloak she wore around them both, so that they were wrapped in one garment. Then, with childish daring, she had suggested that they should go a little nearer to the fire: "Because, if it *must* burn, we might as well keep warm by it." It was always the younger one who was the leader in those days, and Kitty followed admiringly. It had not occurred to her then that she could ever be ashamed of Pete. Of how little worth were the things that she had prized so highly since! They seemed to have crumbled into nothingness in the last hour. Oh, if she could but go back to the morning and begin again! If she could but turn backward in life's book just one page!

A hand touched Kitty's shoulder—a cool, steady hand—and a familiar voice spoke her name:

"Why, Kitty!"

Kitty started quickly. Dreaming? No; there were the dark eyes, the dear face, the alert living form.

"Pete! Oh, Pete, my darling!"

The sudden cry, the clasping arms and the quivering tearful face astonished and alarmed Petra. She looked from Kitty to her two companions, only to find that they also were gazing at her in a bewilderment that held something of awe:

"What is it, Kitty? Why, what is the matter?"

It was Laurence who enlightened Petra, blurting out the truth in boy-fashion:

"Where on earth did you come from? We thought you were—under there." Glance and gesture supplemented the sentence.

Petra shuddered, looked from the terrible mass of débris to Kitty's face, and comprehended all.

"I never thought of that—of your fearing for me," she said, shocked and troubled. "I went home early; you know I spoke of it yesterday. Only grandpa was there; Dick had gone with the squire out to his farm, and we waited for you and wondered why you didn't come, and at last began to grow uneasy. We heard nothing of this until a half hour ago, and then we knew you must have come here. But even then I didn't think—" She left the sentence unfinished and drew her sister a little closer. "Poor Kitty!"

It was all so simple and natural when explained,

and yet, after those awful hours, it was difficult to shake off the feeling that there was something miraculous in Petra standing there alive and unharmed, that she had suddenly come back from another world.

To Petra herself the realization of what might have been—would have been but for a merciful Providence—grew terribly vivid with that scene before her. She saw again the long work-room as she had left it that afternoon, and recalled her indecision whether to go or to stay. What voice had decided for her and sent her away in safety? And why had she escaped, while others had suffered? But amid the strange tumult of feeling—the gratitude so tinged with awe, the wondering question, the keen pain for others and all the shock and horror—there was deep in her heart a new gladness. She had not thought Kitty cared quite like this.

A thrill and movement swept through the crowd:

"They're alive!"

"Some of 'em living!"

"They've heard voices!"

The short sentences flew from lip to lip, and the eager throng swayed and pressed forward, only to be forced back again.

"Back! Keep back! Don't crowd the workers or jar the walls. There's no room nearer."

"Oh, let me get where I can hear if it's my Jimmy that speaks!" sobbed a woman.

But no one could grant that knowledge; it had been faint moans, and not words, that had been heard.

Fresh workers constantly took the places of the weary ones, watchful eyes and busy hands kept the fires brightly blazing, yet, with all the harrowing caution that had to be exercised, the work could progress but slowly.

Careful count and inquiry had at last settled the number and the names of the missing ones. These were not so many as had been feared in the first wild alarm. Besides the two bodies recovered soon after work began, five were believed to be still in the ruins.

"Not what there'd have been if it had happened in busy times, when we was runnin' full force," explained one employed in the mill. "But it's all the same for them that was there, poor souls!"

After a time the one whose voice had been heard was reached and removed, alive but unconscious—"Jimmy," whose wife even so received him ecstatically:

"For he ain't dead, my Jim ain't, an' the doctor says he may get well yet," she repeated, as if her lips would never tire of the story.

But for the others little hope remained. No word or sound of life answered when at intervals the work ceased for a minute and amid breathless silence their names were called.

The hours had passed unheeded, but Kitty's pale face and the thought of her grandfather at last recalled Petra:

"We ought to go home. It seems hard to go away, but we can do no good here, and the time will be long to grandpa."

Petra's own face showed that she had endured all she ought to endure of this scene, and Mr. Holland assented promptly:

"No, we can be of no use here. I had thought that my help might be needed, but there are many more now than can be of service. And we need not wait to learn the fate of the buried ones; there can be little doubt of that now, I fear."

Once away from it all—away from the lights and voices, the sights and sounds, that had kept every sense strained—and walking homeward along the quiet, dusky country road, the excitement subdued a little and the tense nerves relaxed, they found that

they were still human and weary and sorely needed the refreshment of the late supper which Deb had prepared. The whole story was to be told to the grandfather, who in his lonely waiting had heard nothing beyond the first brief tidings, and to Dick, who had but just returned from the farm.

It did not occur to Kitty until long afterward how thoroughly at home in the old house Mr. Holland was that night, nor how a few hours had transformed the formally received guest of the morning into a friend who seemed quite one of themselves. Petra, who had never known her sister's old-time awe and admiration, talked with him easily and naturally, and the simple, straightforward, independent girl with the dark bright face that lighted up so readily interested him. She differed from the type of young ladyhood with which he was most familiar, and he found in the change a charm that would have surprised Kitty. But just then it mattered nothing to Kitty what any one on earth thought either of Petra or of herself; she was only penitently thankful that her chance to "begin again" had been granted.

That night, after all had at last sought rest and the house was still, there came a light tap at Petra's door and a white-robed figure stole in.

"I want to stay with you," said Kitty. "Whenever I close my eyes, all that horror is before them again, and I can't be sure you are safe. Let us sleep together to-night as we did when we were children;" and Petra, clasping her sister close, for the first time felt that Kitty had really come home.

CHAPTER XIII.

A NEW DEPARTURE.

PETRA never went back to the mill. Summer had passed into autumn before the ruined walls were rebuilt, the machinery was replaced and the establishment was in running order again, and in that enforced vacation new plans had been formed. They originated in Grandma Holland's "queerness" and in Laurence's enthusiastic letters home. The letters had suggested to the old lady that the quiet country village and the grand roomy house which the boy described might be the very place she desired for one of her wards—one of those to whom she owed a part of that debt which she was always trying to pay.

"If you could give them room, this lady and her two children," she wrote to Kitty, "I think the change would be a great benefit to them. The lady has just passed through sore trouble in the loss of her husband, and, though she is now in reduced circumstances, she is one to whom I am under

such obligations that I will gladly pay the expenses of her stay with you."

"I know all about that," interpolated Kitty; "grandma is always under all sorts of mysterious obligations to people in distress. And," as her eye hastily ran over the sheet written so painstakingly in the cramped, old-fashioned hand, "she wants us to take these people as boarders, and to make it as pleasant for them as we can."

"Well?" said Petra, interrogatively, but brightening a little; for Kitty's tone indicated that the proposition struck her favorably, and it came at a time, too, when Petra was growing anxious and troubled.

"Why not do it?" answered Kitty. Then she made so long a pause, with her eyes meditatively fixed on the old sofa, that Petra recalled her with another—

"Well?"

"I was just thinking how we could fix up things. Petra, I'm not sure that this isn't a suggestion that may be worth following farther."

"How?" inquired Pete, still monosyllabic in speech.

"This village and the country around it are rather pretty, and there is surely an abundance of

quiet and pure air to satisfy anybody who wants those luxuries. And in town there are people who do want them—people in 'reduced circumstances,' as grandma says, or with modest incomes, who cannot afford to go and who do not want to go to fashionable resorts, but who would like to seek recreation at some nice inexpensive country place if they only knew where to find one."

"And you think this might be the place?" said Petra, thoughtfully. "But wouldn't making it inexpensive for them make it unprofitable for us?"

"Oh, I was speaking only comparatively," explained Kitty. "You have no idea, Pete, how expensive it is to stop at some of those stylish summer places. I went with Cousin Maria, you know, and I didn't think much about it at the time, but I have known since that the prices were exorbitant. Terms that would seem very reasonable in comparison would leave a nice margin of profit for us, I am sure."

"We have room enough," said Petra, "but the putting in order—"

"That is the trouble," admitted Kitty; "we have so little to work with. But the rooms are large and airy and the woodwork is nice; and if we could manage a little paper-hanging and pretty

furniture— It needn't be expensive. There is my quarter's salary due next week, you know. Seventy-five dollars will not go very far, and we need it for other things; but if we thought this might pay the best, we could make a beginning."

The earnest talk that followed resulted in Kitty's sending word to Mrs. Holland that not only would they receive the family she had mentioned, but also would be glad to take others.

"I wonder I did not think of it before," said Kitty, in those busy days of planning and contriving, when they did so much and such varied work themselves that she laughingly declared they would soon be able to go into business as house-furnishers and decorators if the scheme of summer boarders should prove unsuccessful.

Pete and Kitty hung paper, covered old chairs with chintz, manufactured dressing-tables and lounges, and managed to make their small capital do wonders. Kitty's deft fingers and her knowledge of what would be required were invaluable, and she evinced the same readiness in expedients which served her so well in her school-work. But Petra's clear brain and business capacity were not less useful, and Kitty often watched her wonderingly. It sometimes seemed to her that she was

only just beginning in these days to make her sister's acquaintance.

In truth, Petra had greatly changed since that careless day when she sat in the old apple tree. One by one God's messengers of sorrow, care, thought and responsibility had done their work as the slow months went by. Her hours of study, though often it had seemed to her that she was accomplishing very little in them, had amounted to a good deal in the aggregate. And Kitty herself had helped in the change. Even while her presence often seemed but a disappointment and a heartache she had exerted an influence. Her language and manner, her books and studies, had all had their effect upon Petra, just as Petra's hatred of shams and her honest, straightforward loyalty and common sense had in turn influenced Kitty. There is perhaps no more powerful agent in character-moulding in this world of ours than that strange one which we usually mourn over as uncongenial companionship.

The letter to Mrs. Holland wrought satisfactory results at both ends of the line. The old lady was glad to find that her half-hesitating appeal to the old Barracks opened so wide a door; it solved some other problems for her, and before the guests she

had first proposed were fairly established two others followed. So it happened that through the latter part of the summer the house had all it was prepared to accommodate, even with the very simple accommodations that were required. The poor little widow and her delicate children, and the tired-out seamstress, who seemed never to weary of the long restful days out of doors, were so easily satisfied, indeed, and so fearful of making trouble, that Kitty confided to her sister a feeling of being almost ashamed to call them boarders. Still, the increase of the family and the necessity of careful forethought and planning made the weeks busy and toilful; but when, one crisp, bright day in October, the little family found themselves alone again, they complacently counted up profits, and agreed that the season's work had been fairly remunerative.

"I mean to make the garden pay better next year," said Dick; "if we are to have the house full of folks, we will not be troubled to find a market for all we raise. What little we had helped a good deal this season, and I don't know how we could have done without the fruit; but I've been thinking of ways to turn some of the ground to better account. Mr. Holland told me how they manage

some of the market-gardens near town, and it gave me an idea."

Clinton Holland had made several visits to the place that summer. After that eventful first one he had "felt like stopping over a train" on his return-trip, he said, "to learn the rest of the story." He went with Laurence to the scene of the disaster, watched for a little the process of rebuilding, and then wandered again to the vicinity of the deserted oil-wells. This spot seemed to possess a fascination for him, and he lingered and studied it until Laurence began to question wonderingly.

"Uncle Clint says it's a pity to see that ground lying waste," the boy remarked at the supper-table, after his uncle had gone; "he says it is near the railroad and has fine water-privileges. But I don't see any good in that: oil-privileges were what was wanted."

"Unfortunately, you are right," laughed Kitty; "any amount of wells filled with water wouldn't prove a source of revenue in this part of the country."

Mr. Holland, however, seemed to have discovered other possibilities. He came again, viewed the site still more critically, and explained to Petra

that he had some thought of erecting a cotton-mill there.

"Provided the ground can be purchased or leased on reasonable terms," he added, with a smile. "What do you think of such a project?" he asked.

Petra's face brightened with pleasure and surprise. Money instead of that idle tract of land would be so much to them!

"I fear I cannot be a disinterested adviser," she answered, honestly, "for of course we would be glad to dispose of the ground. I am sure a mill would be a benefit to the village, but I cannot tell what the reward might be to you; I do not know anything about that."

"No, I suppose not." He hesitated and laughed. "I do not know much about that myself, nor about the business; but I have a friend who is wiser and has a practical knowledge of it in all its details. He has interested me in it, and I shall depend on his judgment about doing anything here."

Kitty was amazed when the conversation was repeated to her.

"It would be delightful for us. I never dreamed of anybody wanting to buy that ground," she ex-

claimed. "But what can possess Clinton Holland to think of such a thing? Why, Pete, you have no idea of the money they have—he and his brother—and what great enterprises they are connected with; and why he should care to start a mill in a little place like this I can't see, unless it may be for the sake of that friend he mentioned. However, I hope he will do it. It may not be a matter of much consequence to him, but it will be a great deal to us."

Whatever might have been Clinton's motive, it was sufficiently strong to prevent him from dropping the matter, as the girls had half expected him to do. He came late in the autumn, bringing with him a quiet business-like man who was "all plans and figures," Kitty said, "and who viewed the ground from all points of the compass, surveying it mathematically, geometrically, mechanically and mysteriously." But he fully approved of it, and the longed-for sale was consummated.

"We shall begin building as early in the spring as the weather will permit," said Mr. Holland.

The sum received for the land would do much toward putting the house in better order and fitting it up for summer boarders, and the household, after a sober council, decided so to invest it.

"Slowly and only as we need it," said Kitty, advocating the measure. "But, from what we have done this year, I believe that if we make the place tasteful and inviting we can have all the boarders we want."

Petra drew a long breath of relief in feeling that she could conscientiously agree with her sister. It was restful to find more congenial work opening and to feel that the weary days in the mill were over. They had been hard days and the burden of care had been heavy—how heavy she only dared allow herself to realize now when it seemed lifting. She had thought of resuming her old place for the winter, but the plans for the coming season called for much preparation in the way of sewing, and Kitty was busy in her school.

"You stay at home and do the getting ready, Petra," Kitty said; and Dick approved the suggestion with the superior air of the man of the house:

"Of course! We've had enough of that old factory."

Having something with which to carry out plans made planning a rare pleasure for at least two members of the household, and there was ample time in the long winter evenings to consult and to

arrange with careful forethought for the improvements to be made in the early spring.

In one of those winter days Clinton Holland was at his brother's, and in answer to Bradley's jesting questions he admitted his new purchase and his purpose of building.

"How would you like to go into partnership with me in that enterprise, mother?" he asked, turning to the old lady, who, in her favorite seat by the fire, had half-absently listened to the conversation. She started at the sudden question, and a faint flush, the old look of pain, swept over the delicate face:

"I? I have nothing to invest, Clinton. You know: nothing of my own."

"Well, what you hold for somebody else, then," he persisted, drawing a little nearer to her. "Isn't there a more effective way of helping people than by simply giving to them? Isn't it better to furnish work, and so help them to help themselves? Really, that is all I am planning for in this new mill—that it shall be a benefit to those who work in it, and indirectly to the village. If it is self-sustaining, it will meet that purpose, though I shall be disappointed if it is not much more than that. But the profits shall be used to improve the works

and the workmen; not a penny of them shall go into—any other business, unless it is some similar enterprise."

If Clinton's purpose was to add to the sum of human happiness, he might have considered its success already begun in the brightness of the face before him.

"I shall like to have a share in it; I shall indeed, my son—"

The voice was tremulous, but Clinton covered the abrupt ending of the sentence with some commonplace details about the dimensions of the purposed building and about the advantages of the site selected. Then he glanced at his watch. He had spent the day at his brother's, but he had mentioned this matter only just as he was on the point of departing.

"I must go or I shall miss my train," he said; and he added lightly, "I can write you more full particulars of our great venture, mother—that is, if you care to hear any before you see me again."

The other faces in the room were a study. Barbara's was wondering, eager, incredulous; Bradley's was half perplexed, half satirical; while Laurence, his elbows on the table, his chin between his palms, questioningly looked from one to the other.

"Going over to the enemy, Clint?" asked his brother, in a low voice and with a peculiar smile, as he opened the door.

Clinton answered only with a short laugh and a hasty good-bye, but as he reached the street he pulled his hat low over a face that held no light in it and stalked moodily down the street. Laurence watched him from the window. Something in the solitary figure tramping through the snow in the wintry twilight suggested a dreary contrast to the brightly-lighted rooms and to the circle Clinton had left.

"I don't see why Uncle Clint wants to live by himself in rooms," remarked the boy, disapprovingly. "Why doesn't he get a nice home and get somebody like Mother Barbara to put in it?"

"He can't," responded Colonel Holland, promptly. "There isn't any other like her in the world; we have the only specimen."

Barbara looked up with an answering smile in her eyes, but checked a sigh in the same instant. Ah! how hard it was that through all the sweetness of this cup she must still taste the bitterness! She wondered what whim—it could scarcely be more than a whim—had seized her brother-in-law. The Hollands were not niggardly, nor were they slow in

responding to the ordinary calls for charity and aid which form so large a part of city life, but their giving had always been along the line of other people's benevolences, and had seemed chiefly a matter of careless good-nature. They had never assumed the *rôle* of philanthropists. Barbara could not understand this new departure, and she was sure it puzzled her husband, though he did not allude to it. And then the strange promise Clinton had made regarding the profits of the new enterprise! But that might have been to please his mother.

It did please Clinton's mother.

"It opens a way for a kind of help that I have often wanted to give and could not give. I could do so little!" she said to Barbara the next day. "But, daughter, it is Clinton's planning it—his promising what he did—that I think of most. I don't know what it means, but God does. I can't see where it leads, but I think it must be a door of his opening."

CHAPTER XIV.

THE SOUL OF IT.

"TACK, tack!" went Kitty's light hammer, busily putting up curtains at the windows where the soft spring sunlight shone in. "Tap, tap!" answered a heavier hammer from without, where Dick was fastening a straggling rose-vine on to a new trellis beside the piazza. For at last the old front platform had taken to itself pillars and a roof and had become a veritable piazza, and a very comfortable and inviting one. That, with a coat of paint which attired the whole building in a pretty, soft tint, was the only external change which had been attempted, but together they had wonderfully transformed the appearance of the old Barracks.

Inside the great front room the faded old Brussels with its border of rag carpet had been taken from the floor and replaced by a pretty but inexpensive ingrain. The shawl had vanished from the piano, and Kitty had had the instrument it-

self put in as good condition as its age would allow—her "one extravagance," she called that outlay. Neat light paper on the walls and a few new chairs—two or three of them upholstered by the girlish fingers which had certainly grown skillful at such work—completed the improvements there. Very simply furnished the room certainly was, but prettily and harmoniously. It was its finished look which, with the gleam of the pillars outside, suddenly recalled to Petra the day when she had heard it called "a mass of beginnings." How far away that time seemed! Surely there had been growth since then, and now, at last, the old house had felt the touch of a new life and was growing also.

"I wish we could put soul into it," she said, thoughtfully.

"Into what?"

Kitty turned quickly on her step-ladder to see what her sister could be busy with that needed such a strange addition. She saw only yards of delicate chintz that belonged to the chamber-furnishing, and repeated her question more wonderingly still:

"A soul into what, Petra?"

"Into—everything."

Petra's dark face flushed a little; her wistful words had seemed to speak themselves and were not easy to explain.

"Thought is deeper than all speech,
Feeling deeper than all thought,"

and she was not quite sure that she could clearly express even to herself just what her wish meant. But she told of that eventful day, of her visitor and of the words that had awakened her thought:

"And now that it isn't a dead beginning any longer, but is growing into shape— Well, I was thinking about the 'In the beginning' of the Bible—how the light and growth, the forming and setting in order, the human bodies even, were only a getting ready, and then God breathed into this creation the breath of life and crowned it with 'a living soul.' I'd like a soul in our lives, Kitty —in this new work; something to make it more than just a means of getting food and clothing."

For a moment a mist of tears dimmed Kitty's eyes; she had not thought beyond externals—she who had come home with such a sense of her own superiority, consoling herself for her enforced association with those so far beneath her by the hope that she might be able to elevate them a little. It

seemed to her now that whatever was true, worthy or unselfish about her she had learned from Petra.

"I think the soul *has* come to some of it," she answered, slowly.

At the opposite end of the village change and building had been going on also. Excavations had been filled up, old wrecks removed, and "Wilder's Folly," as the tract had been christened, had become a scene of busy activity quite startling to the quiet village. The building was carried forward as rapidly as a large force of workmen could do it, and the contractor assured all visitors that it was "tip-top good work, too; no sham or slighting anywhere in material or labor, either. Mr. Holland wants the best, and he's willing to pay for it."

The manufacturer who had at first approved the location, and under whose supervision the mill was approaching completion, also heartily commended its construction. But there was one part of the building which he had no share in planning, and over which he shook his practical head and doubtfully twisted his gray moustache, expressing the opinion that it was "a queer bit of fancy-work to hitch on to a cotton-factory."

"You don't think it will interfere with the spin-

ning, do you, Dorsey?" questioned Mr. Holland, quizzically.

"Well, no; I can't say that it will."

"Nor affect the quality of the weaving?"

"Maybe not. I don't say it will interfere with anything," answered the superintendent, non-committally, "but it's a new notion to me, and I don't know how it will work."

"Neither do I," answered Mr. Holland, undisturbed. "We will try it and see before we pass judgment upon it."

Mr. Dorsey could not view innovations so hopefully, and, though he did not really oppose this one, he evidently viewed it with distrust and did not intend to be in any wise responsible for it. When he showed visitors through the new building, pointing out the different departments and explaining the branch of work for which each was intended, he always paused a little uncertainly over that one room:

"This? Well, I don't know as I can rightly give it a name; sort of an experiment-room, I call it. Some new-fangled notion Mr. Holland has got into his head."

It was to an inspection of this debatable ground that Mr. Holland invited Petra one summer day.

"I want you to see it and give me the benefit of your opinion," he said.

The words included both girls, but Mr. Holland's glance sought Petra, and Kitty, privately deciding that her own opinion would be valueless concerning anything pertaining to mills, pleaded a busy morning and sent her sister to do duty for both.

The mysterious apartment proved to be only a pleasant, airy room holding some comfortable chairs, a few small light tables and a row of bookshelves, empty as yet.

"A dining-room, noon resting-place, or whatever you choose to call it, for the use of the women and girls who bring their dinners with them," Mr. Holland explained. "Something I saw in New York suggested it, but it was not connected with a factory there, and I know Dorsey thinks that fact makes a vast difference and that there will soon be a divorce here on the ground of incompatibility. But it seems to me that a dinner away from the dust and the sight of machinery must at least be more enjoyable, to say nothing of a few conveniences in the way of setting a table or making a cup of coffee on that range in the adjoining room. And a quiet, comfortable place in which to rest, though not much in itself—"



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"You don't know how much," interposed Petra, with flushed cheeks and kindling eyes; "I do. And I know that a room like this will uplift the whole life of some of these girls. It is far more than a mere provision for physical comfort."

"You do not think it nonsensical, then? And now for suggestions."

From Petra's own past—from the remembrance of weary days when an hour in a room like this would have rested mind as well as body, and have given fresh strength for the afternoon's toil—there came to her a quick perception of all that this place might be made and of the additions it needed. A few of these she mentioned, and then her glance turned to the bookshelves.

"For filling those I want to ask your help and Miss Kitty's, if you will be so kind as to give it," Mr. Holland said. "You will know what to select; I do not."

It was no distasteful commission, as Petra's face showed more emphatically than her quiet words.

Kitty, even with her new estimate of her sister, would have been somewhat surprised at the talk about books that followed—at Petra's knowledge of the subject and at Mr. Holland's appreciation of her opinion. In truth, the gentleman convers-

ing with Petra wondered how and where this girl had gained so much. Not her information—it did not occur to him that means or opportunity had been lacking for that—but her independence of thought and her practical application of what she knew. There was about her an absence of self-consciousness, a straightforward earnestness and honesty, that interested him.

"What a pleasure it must be to use money as you are using it!" she said as they turned homeward. "Why do not more people think of such things—people who could do them?"

Petra's approval of the plan had been a pleasure, but at this first commendation of its author—expressed rather by tone and glance than by words—his face suddenly clouded:

"I do not know about other people. For myself— Well, when a man has more than he can possibly use for himself, he doesn't deserve much credit for giving away a little of the surplus. Your Bible doesn't count gifts that cost nothing, I believe?"

"It says, 'Blessed is he that considereth the poor.' I think that the consideration costs more than the giving, and the gift isn't usually of much value without it," answered Petra, thoughtfully.

Then the peculiar wording of her companion's last sentence struck her, and she turned toward him with a swift question: "*My* Bible, you said. Why mine more than yours, Mr. Holland?"

"You accept it, I suppose, while I— Perhaps I do not dare appropriate it."

The affectation of lightness was scarcely successful, but Mr. Holland speedily changed the conversation:

"Oh, we must have not only books but periodicals in that room. Don't you think we ought—good weekly papers and some of our best magazines? Can you and Miss Kitty look over the list and decide what will be the most suitable?"

Petra went home with a conviction that the new mill would have a soul in it, and also with some new ideas for her own working out.

Kitty was deeply interested in her sister's description, but bewildered also:

"It wouldn't seem so queer if I hadn't known —or fancied I knew—Clinton Holland years ago; all this is not one bit like him. But then," she added, half laughing, half humbly, "I am not much like the Kitty he knew in those days, either —at least, I hope I am not, in some ways—and the thought of you talking over all these plans

with him and advising him in regard to them is as bewildering as any of the rest of it. You too have changed, Petra. There must be something marvelous in the air of this village."

Petra laughed with a happy light in her eyes.

"Oh, we are growing; the soul is getting into our lives, maybe. I think," she said, more slowly, "this afternoon did show me some ways of putting a little more meaning into my own life."

The selection of those books—carried forward slowly and "around the edges of busy days," as Kitty expressed it—was profitable work and furnished excuse and material for many a pleasant hour of reading and exchange of views. It was after an evening so spent that Kitty, looking through a drawer for a box of embroidery silks, came upon her almost forgotten diary. Taking up the dainty volume, she glanced here and there through the experiences so carefully detailed for the benefit of her friend Angie Bates. Her cheeks crimsoned as she read, and at last she tossed away the book with a vigorous exclamation not at all complimentary to herself:

"Little simpleton!"

On sober second thought Kitty took up the diary again, however, and, deliberately tearing out all the

written pages, carried them down as material with which to light Deb's fire.

"The blank leaves will serve for school-exercises," she said, rather grimly, to herself; "I shall not need them for their original purpose. People who are really living have neither time nor inclination to watch themselves through a microscope, and microscopic glasses that make every mole-hill into a mountain are not the best possible spectacles with which to travel."

Through all the cheerful labor of putting the house in order there had been the doubts that must attend any untried enterprise, the fear on the part of Petra and Kitty that, after all, they might be making a mistake and investing their little capital in a way that would bring no return. The early summer banished the last of these fears, however, for guests came. Two or three pleasant families, two tired teachers in search of a quiet vacation and one of Mrs. Holland's protegées occupied the rooms so carefully arranged, and enjoyed the fresh fruits and vegetables from Dick's garden.

That garden was a success, as Dick triumphantly announced many times during the summer, and the boy himself, prompt, energetic and enjoying his re-

sponsibility as "the man of the house," was not only a success, but also a necessity. With his help and with a stout young girl in the kitchen to save Deb's failing strength in the busiest days, the work went forward bravely. Old Deb had scouted the idea of needing a helper; but when the strong-armed damsel was fairly installed, she accepted the situation and ordered her about right vigorously, admitting to herself that it seemed "like ole times" when she was the "head of somefin' like a kitchen." No one about the place was so elated over the improvements in the house and in the manner of living as was faithful old Deb. The grizzled head under the snowy turban nodded its approval, and its owner soliloquized in wondering gratitude:

"Eberyting is a workin' an' a twistin' 'round, an' jes' when ye shore de worse gwine ter happen ye look up, an' dere it am turn to a blessin'. De Lord's ways ain't ours, shore 'nuff, but dey's a mighty sight better."

More than one of our circle was learning that lesson in those days and trying to follow that wiser leading. "If we lift up to him any good honest work that it is ours to do, God will breathe into it the breath of life," Petra had decided, and the new spirit in her own life was becoming more manifest

every day. New opportunities were opening, also, and she was beginning to watch for these as for opening doors.

The late summer brought unexpected sojourners in the members of Mrs. Bradley Holland's family. All but Mr. Holland himself: he had been called West on business that precluded his wife from accompanying him; and as Mrs. Holland the elder, to the silent astonishment of the household, had expressed a desire to visit "Clinton's mill," Barbara eagerly proposed going with her.

"I'm afraid you will find it rather dull there, my dear, though really I know very little about the place," Colonel Holland said, doubtfully. "It may please mother. The marvel is that she should want to go anywhere."

But Barbara insisted that she preferred the quiet little place to any more fashionable resort, and, as Laurence was eager to go again and was delighted at the thought of introducing his stepmother to his favorite nooks, Colonel Holland only good-naturedly shrugged his shoulders and offered no further protest. In truth, though he scarcely acknowledged so much to himself, he was not unwilling to learn something more of this new enterprise in which his brother had engaged. While he had

said nothing about it, he had wondered over it not a little, and he arranged that his party should arrive at the Barracks in the morning and at an hour that would necessitate his waiting until afternoon to take his own train westward. He had, therefore, ample time to explore the village and to examine the mill, and the last he did thoroughly, Clinton himself acting as his guide. The elder brother asked a few questions and used his keen eyes well, but, with the exception of the one room which Mr. Dorsey called the "double-distilled philanthropy attachment," it was only an ordinary cotton-mill, and not a venture of sufficient magnitude to explain why it should have engaged Clinton.

"Is this Dorsey some especial friend of yours—some one whom you wanted to establish in business?" the colonel asked.

"Dorsey? Oh no; he isn't the sort of man to be suffering for a position: he is too practical, energetic and well posted in his particular line for that. I've known him for some time, though, and I knew he was just the one for this place."

"But what did you make such a place for? That's what I don't understand. What do you expect from it?"

"Will it not be a benefit to the village?"

"Of course; it doesn't take a very penetrating mind to discover that. The sleepy little place seems to have wakened up at the mere prospect. But I was talking about the benefit to yourself."

"To me?" Clinton hesitated, and the answer came rather sadly: "Not any that I know of. What of it? We do not lack money—such as it is—that we need to be always watching for more."

That statement did not make the matter any clearer to Bradley Holland, and he went on his way in no wise enlightened concerning "Clint's new freak," as he termed it.

That the mill was considered a benefit to the village there could be no question. Already many families were coming to the place in the expectation of securing work. The stores were adding to their stock of goods, and business was brightening in every direction. The increase of population which the mill would bring made the erection of new dwellings also a necessity, and to meet this necessity a row of neat cottages had been planned. In the arrangement of these Mrs. Holland took an active interest, and her face and her manner were a constant marvel to Kitty.

"If you had seen her as I did—so sad and

timid, keeping all to herself, as if she had no part in anything—you wouldn't wonder that I hardly know Grandma Holland," she said to Petra.

"But it is a sad face yet, only that it lights up now and then," commented Petra.

"There's a difference—the greatest difference in the world," insisted Kitty. "She isn't half so—queer. I do not know what has made the change unless it is due to Mrs. Bradley."

For it occurred to Kitty as she watched the old lady leaning upon the arm of her daughter-in-law as they went out for their morning walk, and as she noticed the constant evidences of confidence and affection between them, that neither Cousin Maria nor herself had ever shown so much consideration for "Grandma Holland."

Another new discovery to Kitty was the relationship of Mr. Kent to the Hollands.

"Only a distant cousin, but he knew all about them that day when I made my ridiculous visit and told him— I'm sure I don't know what," she soliloquized, with burning cheeks.

That the elder Mrs. Holland knew and valued the connection was manifest by the promptness with which she claimed it the first Sunday after

her arrival. When her glance first fell upon the face in the pulpit, she started, and after the service was ended she waited to meet the pastor, who came straight toward her with outstretched hand.

"John Kent! I didn't know you were here," she said.

"And I didn't know *you* were coming," he laughed.

Barbara remembered the name and bent upon its owner a moment's swift scrutiny as he was presented to her. This, then, was the visionary man whose ultra notions would upset the earth! His very practical sermon had not sounded like it.

CHAPTER XV.

THE TOUCH OF THE ANGEL.

SUMMER blossoms and autumn winds had fulfilled their mission, and the winter's snow was whirling down on the city streets. Now and then a gust sweeping up from the bay caught the falling flakes, and, hurrying them out of their quiet course, sent them flying around corners and into deep doorways.

"The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit." The words came naturally to Barbara, watching the scene from her window, for her thoughts were busy with the evidences, all around her in these weeks, of the Power, unseen but mighty, which sways human hearts and lives. Beginning silently—who could say in what lonely chamber or believing soul?—coming none knew how, deepening the earnestness of a prayer, touching cold lips with

fervor, passing from heart to heart, swelling into song, breaking into sobs,—it had grown and widened until it swept through all the churches. Even those who shunned the meetings could not wholly escape its weighty mysterious influence, while to those who welcomed it it was a season of growth and of blessing. To Barbara the joy of the full room, the earnest voices and the eager interest made only more intense her anxiety and her longing for one who held aloof from it all. Others came; men of business, careless men of the world, women of fashion, were numbered among those who heard the heavenly call.

Laurence had yielded his young heart early in the meetings, and his eyes sought those of his stepmother whenever prayers were offered for "absent friends."

"Can't we have him with us yet, Mother Barbara? Doesn't 'whatsoever ye ask' mean that?" he questioned.

"'If two of you shall agree'—you know that promise—and there are more than two of us right here at home—grandma, you and I."

But as the weeks went on Barbara's faith often faltered. It sometimes seemed to her that downright opposition would be more hopeful than the

courteous, smiling indifference which could remember the services to provide that carriage or sleigh should be in readiness for those who chose to go, could listen with amiable tolerance to the accounts brought home, and then could calmly go on its own way untouched.

"Bradley, will you not go with us to-night?" she urged—an invitation that in one form or another had often before been given.

"Oh, not to-night, my dear. Excuse me, but I have a business engagement this evening that I do not know how to postpone. Some other time, if I must go. But really, Barbara, you know I don't enjoy such things as you do. I suppose it sounds very dreadful," with a laugh, "but it seems to be a constitutional weakness of mine. Can't you call it a mere matter of taste and let me gang my ain gait?"

"A mere matter of taste whether our paths are to lie together or to separate for ever? Oh, Bradley!"

"But that, you see, is just what I don't believe—that doctrine about endless separation, and all those terrible things that the preachers harrow up your soul with."

"What *do* you believe?" she asked.

"Believe that my wife is the best little woman in the world, and that she is welcome to go to all the meetings she likes, and that I will go with her some time if it will afford her any pleasure and if she will kindly excuse me this time. How will that do for a creed?"

But when the light touch had vanished from his arm and his wife had left the library, Bradley found that the subject had not departed with her. What did he believe? The light answer he had given would not quite suffice. After all, why did he so persistently refuse to go with her? Was it possible that he really feared those things which he affected to despise? He did not enjoy them, he had said, but neither did he enjoy the art-lectures which his wife valued so highly, nor some of the classical concerts in which she delighted, yet that fact had not prevented his accompanying her and feeling rather proud of her appreciation of fine art. Why did he so shrink from going with her now? Had he a lurking dread of this influence which was swaying others? Was he really so weak as that? He scornfully repudiated the suggestion, but it was because he could not forget it, and to assure himself of his own strength and superiority to such folly, that the next evening found him

without any engagement and "at Mrs. Holland's service," as he playfully announced. His look and his tone, a certain dancing light in his eyes as they met hers, heavily taxed Barbara's drooping faith and boded ill for any effect the meeting might have, but she could only accept his offered companionship and leave the rest with God.

The bright room was well filled, the sermon was clear and forceful, appealing rather to judgment and reason than to emotion, yet to Barbara there seemed an awful solemnity in the reiterated question, "What shall I do then with Jesus which is called Christ?" Tremulous voices around her told that other hearts were touched, but her own heart sank as she stole a glance at the cool, imperturbable face beside her. She could not see deeper than the face; she could not see how the soul rallied all its old arguments, ranged them in force and felt but would not admit their weakness—how it was vexed at its own unrest and at the awakening it had dared, and longed to escape from the place and that troublesome questioning.

As Bradley and his wife passed out of the church Bradley threw back his shoulders and remarked,

"It seems good to get into the fresh air again." After a moment he added carelessly, "Not a par-

ticularly bad speaker—I've heard worse—if only he had not such a rasping voice."

That was Mr. Holland's sole comment, and his wife, her tears hidden only by the darkness, dared not trust herself to answer it. She was not a little surprised, therefore, when he presented himself the next evening in overcoat and muffler, ready to go with her.

"Oh, if I am to win a martyr's crown at all, I may as well have one of respectable size," he replied to the inquiring glance that Barbara could not wholly veil.

The truth was that it had been a troubled day. The old teachings heard in early life which Bradley thought he had long since put aside as antiquated and outgrown came thronging back, and he could not push them away as old superstitions. What should he do with Jesus? for he must do something —must settle what he believed and disbelieved. And then, when by long-practiced sophistries he had argued down the subject and turned from it, it would not stay settled, but straightway faced him again. Before the day was done he wished that he had been cowardly enough to have stayed at home the night before, and had let the whole subject alone. Then, as he detected himself in that wish,

he took himself fiercely to task. Was he so foolish as to be worried over these things if they were not true? And if they *were* true— Oh, what then? So weary of the conflict within him he grew that he sought the meeting the second night to drown out the effects of the first. A subtle hope of hearing something that he could disbelieve and antagonize lured him, while he tried to flatter himself that his going again was proof that he was investigating boldly and fairly.

Poor Self! it is so seldom treated quite honestly by any of us!

Whatever others found that evening, there was no comfort for Colonel Holland. Tortured with questions, convictions and forebodings, yet vexed at his own unrest and battling fiercely against it, he silently left the church. The affectation of levity was gone, but he would open his heart to no one. For a day or two he plunged deeply into business, forsook the meetings and vainly tried to forget them; then, in desperation, he turned to them again. Sorely troubled he evidently was, but determined to solve the problem in his own way and alone. Loving eyes watched him as the days went by, loving hearts prayed for him, but no human hand could take part in the conflict.

To Barbara the struggle grew unendurable. One night, when Colonel Holland had shut himself in the library and she heard his slow pacing to and fro far into the night, she went down to him.

"Bradley, let me share it," she pleaded, tremulously. "How can I help suffering with you? Do not try to shut it away from me."

Bradley shook his head gloomily:

"You cannot help me—not even you, Barbara. 'Every man must bear his own burden;' wasn't that the text the preacher gave us the other night? Each soul alone must settle its own destiny. It is true."

"'Cast thy burden upon the Lord, and he shall sustain thee;' that too is true. Have you forgotten the One who asks the weary and heavy laden to come to him? Surely you believe him?"

"I do believe; that is the trouble of it," he groaned. "If I could only disbelieve!"

"No, no!" She interrupted the wild words with a shudder. "You do not think what you are saying, dear. Bring the burden to Christ, and he will give you rest."

"But I cannot bring that only; if I seek to leave that at his feet, I must leave everything there —everything. I am not so blind as to fancy that

I can make a halfway surrender; it must be all or nothing."

"And why should it not be all? What would you keep back?" she asked.

"Barbara, you do not understand; I cannot tell you how it looks to me. It is all my past, all that my life has built up, that must go if once I turn my face in that direction. Fortune, position, business relations,—I can keep none of them." Then, at his wife's questioning glance, the seething thought, pent up so long, broke down the barriers of silence: "I may as well tell you all, Barbara. It is the old question—mother's question—that I have put out of sight all the years, that I would not own had an existence in any practical brain. But this religion of Jesus Christ—it isn't the wisdom of this world, and it cuts a straight path through arguments, policy and self-interests. I cannot build this new life on the old foundation; I will not be hypocritical enough to pretend to try. And yet to give up all the old ambition and plans, all the work of my life! It is hard! There are others to consider, too."

"Not those nearest to you," she interrupted, quickly. "What could all the treasures of this world be to them as weighed against yourself?"

It was the old awful problem that our Lord has sent down through the centuries for each one to answer for himself: "What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul?"

To this man, proud, ambitious and successful, renunciation was bitter. As he had said, not even his wife could understand all that it was to him and all that it involved.

"Do not wait for me, Barbara," he said, at last; "go and rest. I cannot sleep, and I must fight this out some way—for myself."

Barbara could not sleep, but she could pray, and in another room a gray head, bowed beside the cradle that had held Bradley Holland in his babyhood, breathed the prayer that had ascended from beside it then—that had never ceased to ascend through all the years: "God save my boy!"

The next morning came bright and clear—a winter morning with dazzling sunshine on the snow—and Laurence's boyish face reflected something of its brightness as he smiled into his stepmother's troubled eyes.

"I think it will all come right to-day, Mother Barbara," he whispered.

"Why?" she asked; for there had been no sign

of peace or of comfort in the gloomy brow with which her husband had bidden her good-bye when he went away to his office.

"I don't know why, only I feel so sure of it. I felt so when first I opened my eyes this morning—that this would be his birthday. There will be joy in heaven, but it doesn't seem as if the angels can be quite so glad as we shall be, does it?"

Barbara clasped the hand that was resting on her shoulder. The boy had grown doubly dear to her in the last few weeks. He was very happy in his fresh young Christian discipleship, which was simple and natural—that of a true boy. He had not been transformed into a model or a teacher; he had lost nothing of his vivacity or of his bounding life, but he had turned with frank, loving loyalty to a new Friend and Master and was trying to obey his will.

"I don't suppose he wants me to be one of his deacons or elders, but just one of his boys," he had explained to his stepmother.

Barbara looked up at Laurence as he stood beside her now, and, moved by a sudden impulse, laid her cheek upon the hand she held and spoke the words that were in her heart:

"You are a great comfort to me, Laurence."

"Am I?" The bright face grew brighter still. "I'm glad of that, for you have been

'The sunlight, moonlight, starlight,
Been the firelight of my people.'

Wasn't that what you read to me out of 'Hiawatha' the other day? You have made it so much pleasanter here ever since you came, and then"—he paused and the glad voice dropped reverently—"you led me to Him, you know."

"Laurence! I did not know that." A light flashed over her face at the thought.

"Yes; I was thinking of it—you had made me think of it—long before the meetings began."

Laurence had his cap and scarf in his hand, and had only stopped for a parting word with Barbara before he went off on a coasting expedition. She watched him a moment or two later drawing his sled after him down the street—a very boy, and yet his hopeful words had raised her drooping faith, and the assurance he had given her ran like a strain of music through all the morning's duties.

The sweetness was still lingering when Barbara became conscious of hurried voices in the hall, a little stir and bustle that denoted something un-

usual. She had heard a summons at the door and wondered vaguely that no caller was ushered in, and the next moment had forgotten it. Now the agitated tones and a quick exclamation drew her attention again, but she had no time for conjecture before a servant hastened to her door:

"Mrs. Holland—"

The break in the voice, the half-suppressed wanting to "tell her carefully" that reached Barbara from the hall beyond, thrilled her with a sudden terror. She threw open the door and faced an excited group.

"It's Master Laurence, ma'am," said the old housekeeper, answering the question the white lips could scarcely frame. "He's hurt—not badly I hope, but they're bringing him home. He was run over by a heavy wagon or sled."

The man who brought the news interposed and briefly told the story. A large party of boys were out coasting on a quiet street which for the most part had been given up to them, teams either taking another road or good-naturedly keeping out of the track which the boys had worn smooth. But as Laurence went flying down the hill, followed by two or three others, a heavily-loaded sled had suddenly turned a corner, and, reaching the middle of

the street, had stopped directly in the track. A score of voices shouted to the driver, but through either stupidity or malice he refused to move, and in a moment the light sleds dashed against the barrier and were overturned or broken by the violent collision. Some of the boys had time to throw themselves off and escape harm; two or three were severely bruised, but Laurence not only had struck the sled with fearful force, but also had been hurled by the blow under the feet of the horses.

"I'm afraid it's pretty bad, ma'am," said the man, pityingly. "Still, a body can't always tell."

But when the young form that had gone forth so blithely was brought back crushed and helpless, Barbara knew there was no hope of recovery; she read it in the grave faces of the physicians even before they replied to the father's agonized questioning:

"We can relieve his suffering, that is all; there is nothing more that can be done."

Laurence seemed to understand his condition from the time he had been brought home.

"They cannot help me," he whispered; and then, as his eyes turned pityingly from his father to his stepmother, a faint gleam of the old brightness came to them. "I didn't think it was coming this

way—what I told you of, you know—but it's all right."

All thought that the sufferer dropped into unconsciousness then, but later he looked up again, when only the three who loved him best were beside him:

"Don't mourn so. It isn't so very hard to go; it straightens out—some things," he said, feebly. "I had come to believe as grandma does—as you do," he pressed Barbara's hand that held his own—"about the business that brought the money. I knew I never could take any part in it, but there were papa and Uncle Clint, and it was all so mixed up, and going to be so hard by and by. This is a way out of it all."

"Oh, my boy! And it was of you I thought, for you I hesitated," groaned the father.

"For me?" The failing voice wonderingly uttered the words and then slowly seemed to gather their meaning. "Was *I* barring the way? Then you will yield to Him now?"

The murmur of assent was choked and broken, but the boy caught it, and there was a note of triumphant gladness in the next words—his last:

"I told you it would come right to-day, dear Mother Barbara."

So Bradley Holland's story was that of one of old. He lingered with his treasures and would not seek safety until, "the Lord being merciful unto him," an angel "laid hold upon his hand and brought him forth." Alas that it must needs be the angel of death!

CHAPTER XVI.

A WINTER EVENING.

THE last echo of the restless feet and the merry voices had vanished from the little schoolhouse at the cross-roads, and Kitty, with a final glance at blackboards and desks, to see that her domain was in order, turned the key in the battered door and faced the wintry world outside. It was a long and rather a dreary walk that lay between her and home, but she was thinking too busily to remember that as she stepped briskly out into the snowy country road. So fully occupied was she that she did not notice a light cutter that followed her, nor hear a voice that called until her name had been thrice repeated:

"Miss Kitty!"

It was Mr. Kent's sleigh, and as it reached Kitty's side she became aware of the occupant's presence and gladly accepted the invitation to ride.

"I am accustomed to having the whole country-

side to myself at this hour, and so was not thinking of the pleasure of company," she explained.

"But you were very intently thinking of something else; that was evident," laughed Mr. Kent. "May I ask what you found so absorbing?"

"Johnny Mix—as a commentary on the Bible."

Kitty gave the answer smilingly, and Mr. Kent doubtfully studied over it a moment, then shook his head:

"One of your boys, I suppose? I know the Mixes by tribe and by family, but I can't quite place Master Johnny."

"That's the trouble about him—getting him so placed that he will stay. I have been trying it with doubtful success ever since I had the honor of his acquaintance," admitted Kitty. "He is not one of the larger boys who come to study, nor one of the little boys whose failings can be excused on the ground that they are full of life and do not know any better. Johnny is at an awkward age halfway between—tow-headed, freckle-faced, with a deep scowl in his forehead that looks studious, but doesn't mean study; at least, not any study connected with his books. He has wonderful pockets, and they hold almost everything that is of no use and that is very detrimental to a well-ordered

schoolroom—bent pins for the unwary, fish-worms to adorn the desks of the girls, and an array of spools, spindles, sticks and strings that form a wonderful machine for attracting general attention when mine is distracted. You can scarcely imagine anything that cannot come out of those pockets. But his head is an entirely different kind of receptacle, if it deserves that name; I can scarcely draw anything out of that even after I have felt positively sure that I had put something in."

Mr. Kent laughed:

"I think I know Johnny now; at least, I have seen the species. But how is he a commentator?"

"A commentary," corrected Kitty, "and a very unconscious one, I am sure." Then face and voice grew grave as she said, "It was a verse in the psalm we recited this evening that made me think of it: 'He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.' I think I have always had a secret wish that those last four words had been left out—those and others like them in the Bible. Of course I knew that we were unworthy and did not deserve that simply for our sakes God should do all he does for us, yet to think that it was done for his own sake, 'for his own glory,'

took all the sense of tender care out of it, and I have not liked to stop over such words. But all at once, this evening, it occurred to me that they might mean something a little like my relation to Johnny. He is dull and trying, making a slight effort to improve and do right one day, and the next seeming to have lost all desire to be anything but a vexation. But I cannot fluctuate as he does —care for him one day and leave him to himself the next—through all his moods and varyings. I must still do my best for Johnny. I cannot always do it because he is what he is or deserves it, but I do it because I am what I am—older, wiser and above him. For my own sake I cannot do less than my best for him—not because I am seeking any glory for myself instead of his good, but because if I could neglect or retaliate I should be on his level instead of being his teacher and helper. I fear I am not making my meaning very clear." Kitty hesitated. "I was thinking that might be a little like the way Christ keeps on caring for us—because it is in the very nature of his office and himself that he should do so. He is what he is; there is a divine *noblesse oblige* about it, and we are a great deal safer because we are kept 'for his name's sake.'"

"'If we believe not, yet he abideth faithful; he cannot deny himself,'" quoted Mr. Kent.

"Yes, that is it. I wonder I never thought to link that verse with those others," answered Kitty, eagerly; "it would have explained them."

Mr. Kent smiled; he was thinking how the girl's whole spiritual nature was developing, and that she was herself a commentary on the wisdom of Providence. But he only said,

"I suppose I may as well confess at once, Miss Kitty, that I did not exactly happen along this particular road at this particular hour: I was hoping to find you, and I want your help—as usual. How can we get the children from those two German families over beyond the mill into Sunday-school? And what shall we do with them if we do get them?"

The new mill and the new people it brought had greatly changed the village, and, while farmers and tradesmen hailed the increased growth and activity as a great increase of prosperity, the watchful pastor felt that the change held, also, its elements of danger unless this fresh material were properly assimilated. New care and new responsibility had come to him with each of these new souls that came within the possible range of his influence.

The old village in its quiet had known no floating population: the members of its community were the descendants of those whose names were on the stones in its churchyard; but the families which the mill had drawn to the place were quite outside of the local history and traditions. A few of them were foreigners, and altogether they formed a different class of people. The Sunday-school, which had greatly enlarged, had also grown heterogeneous, and here Mr. Kent found Kitty's aid invaluable. The tact which had made her successful in her little kingdom at the cross-roads fitted her for this wider service, and, moreover, numbers of the new-comers were soon enrolled among her daily pupils, and so were more easily reached by her influence than by any other. Through them was a way to their homes, and so more and more the pastor was coming to Kitty with his plans and his problems. The work which she had so ignorantly wished to undertake when she first returned home was really coming to her hands now, but so exceedingly practical and commonplace it seemed as it came to her day by day that she failed to recognize it as in any way connected with her old dreams. And the dream itself was forgotten. If she could still have fancied herself a lady-patroness, the work she was now

doing would have been impossible. She looked up brightly at Mr. Kent's question:

"My sister told me something about one of them this morning that may open a way to reach them. A woman, the mother of one of these families, came to the house yesterday to see if there could be a place found in the mill for a niece who has lately come to live with her: she seemed to think, as Petra had the oversight of the mill-library and reading-room, that she must have something to do with giving work to the girls. The woman spoke but little English, and appeared so disappointed, without being able fully to understand when Petra tried to explain that she had nothing to do with that matter, that Petra finally promised to see Mr. Dorsey herself. Fortunately, he has room for another, or will have next week, and Petra asked Dick to carry them the word this evening or in the morning. To-morrow is Saturday, and I can offer my services as messenger."

"And after carrying such tidings they will scarcely refuse any request you may make?" supplemented Mr. Kent. "I think we may consider that settled."

There were other points to settle, however, and the sober gray horse had reached the Barracks gate

while Kitty and Mr. Kent were still busily talking. Petra met them there; she had just returned from the village, and waited when she saw them coming, making, so Kitty thought, a wondrously pretty picture as she stood in the old gateway. The brown dress and hat were very simple, but they were faultless in taste and finished with a touch of crimson that was exceedingly becoming to the dark, bright face. The young erect figure was not ungraceful in its suggestion of strength, and as Kitty's beauty-loving eye took in the whole scene—the quiet road, the old house beyond and the gate, the snowy earth and the gray sky with a golden belt marking the sunset—it seemed to her that Petra fitted into it perfectly. But many things that had once been out of harmony in Kitty's world were fitting into place now, and for some reason—could that long talk have had anything to do with it?—the world seemed a very pleasant place that evening. There was a soft flush on her cheeks and a happy light in her eyes as she greeted her sister.

Petra, practical maiden, had no thought of either making or discovering pictures just then; her head was full of weightier matters. Ben Farney had been drinking again, and had been away from the mill for a day or two, she told Mr. Kent. Prob-

ably he would lose his place—he deserved to, indeed—but what would become of his poor wife and the children?

"She sent one of the little girls to the library to ask me to stop there on my way home, but I could say little to comfort her, and I really had no advice to give. Mr. Dorsey cannot be expected to keep such a man; he says Ben is not fit to be trusted with a team."

"If he could give him something else to do—something inside the mill—" began Mr. Kent, reflectively.

The gray horse seemed to know the tone, or perhaps he recognized the subject and had learned that it boded long consultation. He began to paw the snow impatiently, and manifested his opinion that it was time to move homeward; it was nonsense to attempt to discuss such questions at a gate. The latter conclusion speedily impressed itself upon the other members of the party, and it was decided that Mr. Kent should drive home and bring his mother back to tea, over which they could talk at leisure, and, also, have the benefit of Mrs. Kent's counsel. It was Petra who gave this invitation.

Kitty hurried into the house and up to her own room to rearrange her dress and her hair, but from

her window she watched the sleigh with its solitary occupant flying down the road.

"He is the noblest man I ever knew, and I am not half good enough," she whispered, with thoughtful face.

Petra carried to Deb the notice of expected guests, and the old woman smoothed her white apron with an air of dignity and remarked,

"What's ter hender der comin', Miss Pete? Yo' needn't worry 'bout no comp'ny long's I'se here. What mo' dey gwine ter want 'n some ob my muffins 'long ob tea an' peaches an' cake an'—"

Petra laughingly cut short the recital of the bill of fare by making her escape from the kitchen, but Deb listened to the retreating steps with a satisfied nod of her head, and muttered,

"Goes flyin' 'bout de house 'nough sight lighter dese days. 'Pears like ole times, wid ministers an' folkses comin' an' goin'."

Petra passed into the pleasant front room, dropped the curtains over the windows, stirred the open fire into a brighter glow and drew her grandfather's chair into the corner he liked best.

The old man greatly enjoyed these social evenings. When the family first talked of opening the house to boarders for the summer, Petra had feared

that seeing strangers about the old place would trouble her grandfather, but the new faces at the table and the occasional pleasant gatherings in the parlor had served to interest him instead. The improvements in the place, and especially in the family fortune, had gratified him; and if, with the pathetic tenacity of age, he clung to old idols and beliefs and referred to all desirable changes as wrought "since little Kitty came home," Petra felt no inclination to combat the statement. So many things had come through Kitty's presence and her own work had so grown and changed in the last two years that she looked back wonderingly. That room in the mill which she had visited as something entirely unconnected with her own life had been really an open door into a new field that had busied heart, hand and brain. The library, selected and arranged, needed somebody to take charge of it, especially as the original plan had soon enlarged its dimensions, and instead of a few shelves filled for leisure hours grew into a library for village use. The cottages in which Mrs. Holland had taken such an interest also fell naturally to Petra's care, and, while this new work proved both remunerative and congenial, she found that she had no need to search for "the soul of it." That part, indeed—

the responsibility, the burden of care for other lives, the feeling that it was the Master's work that her weak, girlish hands were holding—often pressed heavily and made her long, as to-night, to take counsel with those more experienced. So it happened that the circle which presently gathered about the fire was no unusual one, and the conversation soon widened its range to all the new part of the village, its needs, capabilities and possibilities.

Mrs. Holland had made some plans for the coming year, and Kitty was speaking of these when Dick came in from Squire Gynne's office. The old squire's growing infirmities brought constantly increasing work to Dick both in and out of the office, and he was growing tall and manly, with quite the air of a man of business. He brought a letter for Kitty, and as she glanced at the familiar postmark she exclaimed,

"This may give some more definite information; it is from grandma. Probably, though, Cousin Bradley has addressed it," she added, scanning the envelope more carefully.

Deb announced supper, however, and the letter was laid aside unopened, and remembered only an hour later, when the conversation recalled it.

"Oh, we were going to see whether Mrs. Hol-

land sends any word about the work here," said Kitty.

But as Kitty's eyes hastily scanned the page the smile fled from her lips and her cheek paled, for across the cheerful, busy planning for the coming years suddenly fell the shadow of that presence before which human hopes and human plans are powerless. The letter brought word that Laurence was dead. Later in the evening, when they had talked and wondered, questioned and reread the meagre intelligence in the shocked, pitying, tender way that friends will, Kitty said thoughtfully,

"This may change many things here. It was because Laurence was here that his uncle Clinton came, in the first place, and I thought last summer, when Cousin Bradley went over the mill so carefully, that perhaps he too was growing interested in it; but the place is so associated with Laurence that they may all feel that they cannot bear to come here again, and in that case it may affect the carrying out of some projects—or, at least, the forming of others that would have been a benefit to the people here."

There was a touch of anxiety in Kitty's tone, for our hearts are wont to follow where our thought and our labor go, and the interests of these people

were growing dear to Kitty. But the pastor, who held them closer still, answered quietly:

"It may be a bar, and it may be an open door. God knows. We cannot tell which it is until his providence declares it, but often that which seems to us to be a sudden barrier in our way proves to be but his messenger to open a wider path. His thoughts are not ours, and it is a comfort to know that all real good for ourselves or others, all the opportunities we need, are safe, beyond all losing in His hands 'who openeth and no man shutteth, and shutteth and no man openeth.'"

CHAPTER XVII.

ANSWERED.

"IT must all be changed now."

The white flowers—cross and lyre, anchor and pillow—had withered on the grave whose fresh earth they vainly tried to hide, and the work of the world must go on again. Weeks had gone by, and there was a promise of spring in the soft breath of the wind that came through the office window where the colonel was sitting. He had summoned his brother for a long talk, and had slowly explained, so far as words could be made to do so, the change in views, feelings and purposes that must now be wrought out into life.

"It must all be changed. I have dreaded to say this, Clinton, because our business interests have been so interwoven all through the years, and the first venture has so many ramifications now that separation will be difficult."

"Why separate, then?" asked Clinton; he had listened very quietly, saying but little.

"Because we must. I must get away from all connection, even the slightest, with the traffic which I—detest!" the last word came slowly and with emphasis. "I suppose that sounds strange to you, and fanatical, but it is true. You do not know all it has cost me. Importing, storing, as well as all connection, direct or indirect, with manufacture or sale,—I must be rid of it all. I am afraid it will seem to you, Clinton, that I am sacrificing or imperiling your interests, but I will agree to any division you choose."

"But suppose I want to continue the partnership?"

The colonel shook his head:

"I feared you would feel so, but you do not understand—"

"Perhaps *you* do not understand," interrupted Clinton, quietly. "What if I want a partnership in this very thing—the undoing, so far as possible, of the wrong that has been done? I suppose that is what you mean? Why not ask me to go with you on the new road, Bradley? Heaven only knows how weary and heartsick I am of the other way."

The colonel had arisen and was pacing the floor, but he paused abruptly and faced his brother:

"Clinton! You never told me!"

"No. It was cowardly, I suppose, but I knew how you felt about it. The business had grown so complicated, our interests were so entangled, and I had no clear idea of what I could do, scarcely of what I wished to do. It was not conviction so much as dissatisfaction and disgust. I had not reached the point of making a way out of it, and for your sake I said nothing."

The colonel's eyes were dim, but his face lost in that moment something of the sadness it had worn since Laurence died. He held out his hand to meet his brother's in a strong, close grasp, then silently walked away to a distant window.

"Together, then," he said, returning at last to his seat. "That clears the path of what I dreaded most—of all that I really shrank from. But it is strange to think that we are still of one accord and yet have changed so radically on this entire subject."

"The dear old mother," answered Clinton, softly. "She has prayed the whole fabric down. I have felt her prayers these last years as something that was slowly undermining the foundations on which I was building—an invisible power that was against me; and I could not rid myself of it, though I tried to neither believe nor yield."

"Was that the secret of the new mill?" Bradley suddenly asked.

"Yes; I wanted something away from all the other—something clean."

There was long and earnest planning, with busy days over papers and ledgers, before many outward changes could be made. The evil growth that might at first have been easily eradicated had now spread its tentacles far and wide, and the necessary surgery was slow and difficult. Nevertheless, it went forward.

The old distillery out at —— was closed—"for repairs," the villagers said, "or for putting in some improvements in machinery." Some suggested that it had been sold, and wondered that "the Hollands, with all their money, should have kept that old place so long." The supposition of a sale was strengthened by the fact that the man who had had charge of the business was going away. He knew very little about any changes that were to be made, and was very reticent concerning that little; but, so far as he was concerned personally, Colonel Holland had offered him a better place elsewhere, and he was going. For weeks the buildings were closed, and the people of the vicinity idly exchanged opinions and surmises re-

garding the reason; but when they were opened again, the mystery, instead of being solved, had only deepened, for nearly every trace of the manufacture that had been carried on there had disappeared. Vats, presses, everything connected with the process of distilling, had been taken down and carried away, and the supplies stored there had vanished as completely as if the earth had swallowed them up—as, indeed, it had. Then the building was sold for other purposes, and a new industry was started there.

"But if the Hollands wanted to close out, they might have let some of the folks around here have a chance at the stock. It would have paid them better than it did to take it off—though dear knows when or how they did that without anybody finding out," grumbled one old farmer, echoing the sentiments of a few others; but there were many who heartily sympathized with an old deacon who said,

"Well, I never could sing, but, I declare for't, when I pass that place there's one line of a hymn that just naturally sings itself—that one about 'Rejoice to see the curse removed.'"

When it had all been changed and the curiosity and the questioning had had time to die away, there

came quietly to the little town one day an elderly lady who was considered a stranger. So many years had passed that her face and her form were unrecognized by any who might once have known them, and she was able to visit undisturbed the old familiar places. She looked long at the distillery-building as she slowly passed it, pain and thanksgiving mingling in the tears that dimmed her eyes. A little cottage, brown and weather-stained, stood not far distant, and, though it had lost all the trimness and beauty of its youth, she lingered at its gate, and when a bright-eyed boy appeared asked for a drink of water from the well.

"And she didn't seem very thirsty, after all," the boy reported as he returned to his companions. "Guess she only wanted an excuse to sit down on the steps and rest a little."

But the stranger lingered longest at a quiet spot quite outside the town, and almost forsaken now since the bustling little place had grown away from it of late years, and had its more modern cemetery in another direction. This was only a country burying-ground, most of its stones bent and gray with time, the lush grass waving untrodden around the sleepers and a tangle of wild roses growing at will and flinging down showers of pale pink petals.

She brushed aside the soft grass that grew about the stone she sought, and scanned the familiar letters: "John Holland."

"Oh, John, at last!" she whispered. "Do you know that the answer has come at last, and that mine eyes have been gladdened with the sight of His salvation?"

Who shall tell how memory journeyed backward that day and what scenes passed before the eyes that, looking far away, saw neither flitting cloud-shadow nor falling roses? Old and gray-haired, the lady sat there, and it was a trembling, wrinkled hand that softly smoothed with slow caressing motion the grave at her side, but her thoughts were busy with the days of her youth, with the happiness and the pain of earlier years. The faint, sweet breath of the flowers, the clear call of the birds, the tap of the woodpecker's hammer and the faintly heard swish of a scythe in a distant meadow only added to the spell, and more vividly recalled the old happy days before sorrow came. When the burden borne so long had been lifted at last, she had felt an intense desire to revisit the old home. It had seemed to the overcharged heart that only here, where the anguished prayer first began, could the full thanksgiving find expression. But now

words failed; some lines Barbara had sung ran as an undercurrent through her thought:

"He leads us on
Through all the unquiet years;
Past all our dreamland hopes and doubts and fears
He guides our steps. Through all the tangled maze
Of sin, of sorrow and o'erclouded days
We know his will is done;
And still He leads us on."

Through all those weary years when her cry seemed hopeless and the granting of her prayer wellnigh impossible, when she deemed every circumstance adverse and saw in every new event a fresh barrier, —even then and through all these things God was working out his gracious answer. No, she could not speak her joy and gratitude as she remembered it all; but God understood the silence.

Barbara, visiting friends at a little distance, met Mrs. Holland at the station in the evening, as had been arranged. She noted with a tender smile the peace that rested on the aged face. Life's long stormy day was almost over and the promise was now verified: "At evening-time it shall be light."

The hours so full of retrospect to the older lady had passed very differently to Barbara. To her

it had been a day of work instead of memory—of looking forward, instead of backward; but it had left its brightness also on her face. The light in her eyes was the softened joy that shines through tears indeed, but it was very deep. Every room in the great beautiful house missed Laurence; everywhere were reminders of his presence—a book where he had left it, a cap where the careless hands had tossed it—that brought a swift rush of tears. Barbara had not known until now, when she missed him, how dear he had grown. And when she looked into the father's eyes and read his grief, the pain seemed sometimes almost too great to be borne. Yet through it all there came to her often the words Laurence himself had spoken. They had been talking one day of the desire that pressed so heavily on both their hearts, and to the boy's trustful "It will come," Barbara's sorely tried faith had answered forebodingly:

"Yes, but— Oh, Laurence, I begin to fear it will come only through some awful sorrow."

For a moment the bright young face had clouded; then he looked up with a smile:

"Well, God won't make it any harder for us than he can help. And, whatever way the blessing comes, it will be worth all it costs."

Even through all the grief that must needs have its way now, she felt that his words were true: the blessing that had come was worth all the bitter cost. Was it not the gift for which the Son of God had laid down his life, and had not counted even that price too high?

There was a strange restfulness in the rolling away at last of the heavy burden of wrong—a strange sweetness in the working and planning along new lines. The money which, in the words of old Mrs. Holland, "belonged to others," made many things possible, and it was in a search of one of these others—her old friend Jeannette Grey—that Barbara had been that day. Jeannette had not been very strong in those old days when she had stitched so indefatigably, and a late letter from Aunt Cass had casually mentioned the engaging of a new seamstress because "Jeannette seemed to have lost the ability to perform a really good day's work—from ill-health or some reason." The gentle, quiet girl, poor and alone, who out of her own toilsome life could strive to help one whom the world called more fortunate, had been to Barbara always a pleasant memory. It was a feeling that of late had grown to gratitude as she understood more clearly what Jeannette had tried

to show her, and realized that through the sewing-girl had came her first awakening. What if that thin, needle-pricked hand—Barbara could see it yet—had borne less steadily the light entrusted to its keeping? How many blessings Barbara could trace, humanly speaking, back to Jeannette's faithfulness!—her best hopes for herself and all whom she loved.

So it was natural that Aunt Cass's letter should awaken thought that speedily ran into purpose. If Jeannette's health had failed—how could it be otherwise with her wearisome, unsheltered life?—why should not Barbara offer a place and light, congenial employment in her own home? But first there must be a restful summer in the dear old Barracks. How the pure air and the country quiet would refresh Jeannette! and how perfectly she and Petra Wilder would understand each other! On this errand Barbara had gone, but she did not know just where to find the one she sought, and so went first to Aunt Cass.

"Yes, I can find her for you," said the latter lady, beaming graciously over the tempting lunch she had insisted upon ordering, and which Barbara could not help contrasting with the well-remembered table of her girlhood. "She has moved, of

course—seamstresses and laundresses are for ever moving—still, I know about where to look for her. But you do not want her, my dear. I can get you a woman who is far more efficient—one who can accomplish more, and who really is quite stylish in her effects. I thought I had written you about finding one who satisfied me better."

"But I'm not looking for a dressmaker, stylish or otherwise. I want only Jeannette," insisted Barbara, trying briefly to explain.

It was not easy to make Aunt Cass comprehend such a wish; its spirit and origin were unintelligible to her. But one thing which she did clearly understand was that her niece was Mrs. Holland, who was able to indulge any fancy, however expensive. That delightful fact she never forgot.

"What a nonsensical, romantic girl you always were, Barbara! And I really do not see that you have improved in the least," she laughed complacently. "The office of permanent seamstress will certainly be a sinecure in your small family, where you do so little remodeling, and where mending is, I presume, one of the lost arts. I could keep such a person tolerably busy, but for you— However, if you wish to carry out your whim I can easily find Jeannette."

The proposal was no whim to Jeannette, nothing inexplicable, though her pale cheeks flushed with pleasure; but then she knew, as Aunt Cass did not, the other side of the story—the prayers to which this welcome message was the answer.

"I knew it would come in some way, but I did not think of you as the one who would bring it," Jeannette said, her eyes full of grateful tears as they smiled into Barbara's. "God has so many messengers! I'm glad you were the one sent to me."

The journey had seemed tiresome to Barbara that warm morning, but dust and heat were forgotten as she sat in the little upper room which, with all its scrupulous neatness, was so painfully plain and bare. Jeannette's strength had been failing all the spring. She could not goad herself to her usual efforts, and so had lost work that meant a great deal to her. The physician whom at last she had reluctantly consulted informed her that she had been overworking and too closely confined within doors; she simply needed rest and change; which very simple remedies were entirely beyond her reach. That was the story as she briefly told it. Barbara's plan brought fresh life and hope, and its details were easily arranged.

There can be no cure for sorrow like that of helping to lighten another's sorrow, and this balm every one of the Holland household was proving in these days. The young wife was sure of ready sympathy in the success of her errand when she met her mother-in-law; and as the two journeyed homeward together through the slowly-deepening twilight, they discussed many projects of helpfulness that were yet to gladden countless lives. One of these had been of Laurence's beginning. The day after the accident a boy had come to the stricken home bringing a box of flowers. He was a year or two younger than the quiet sleeper in the darkened parlor, but he represented so earnestly that he was one of Laurence's friends, and that "the other boys of the club" had sent him, that the old housekeeper had brought him to Barbara.

"Can't these be put in his hand or be laid somewhere near him?" he pleaded, displaying his offerings. "I'm sure he'd like it, for the boys of the club bought 'em—did it ourselves, without askin' anybody. We wanted to do something for him; we belonged to his club, you see. We—we all liked him."

The boyish voice broke there, the honest gray

eyes filled, and Barbara, to whom all boyhood had grown suddenly dear for the lost one's sake, took the proffered box and held close in her own the brown hand of the donor.

"Tell me about the club," she said. "What was it.

"It was one he started—out on the coasting-ground, you know: none of the rest of us would have thought of it. There's been so much snow this winter, and every day a lot of us would be out there with our sleds. Every day, too, there'd be a lot of fellows watching us—some of 'em only little youngsters, and too poor to have any sleds. We didn't pay much attention, only to call to 'em to get out of the way, till Laurence began to notice how they stood there, and he'd give first one and then another a ride. 'See here, boys,' he says one day, 'don't let's gobble up all the good times because we can; let's give the other fellows a chance.' Well, one after another, we began to do as he did, eight or ten of us, till it was an understood thing on that hill, and we called ourselves the 'Lend-a-Turn Club.' The youngsters at the corners knew about it too, and they'd call out, 'You're a club fellow? Gimme a ride!' That's all. Only if Laurie had always been particular

to keep his own turn, he wouldn't have been hurt yesterday. He'd given somebody else two rides, and that's how he happened to be going down then. We boys talked about it out on the hill this morning, and we wanted to do something, so we bought the flowers. Nobody wanted to bring 'em here, though, but I didn't see how it could be any harm."

"No, no! I'm glad you came," Barbara answered so earnestly that all misgiving was silenced. "Only the roses you have brought shall be in his hand. Come and we will place them there."

The room into which he was led was such as the young caller had never seen before, but he did not notice it: his eyes sought only the still face of the one who was lying there. He watched silently until the precious blossoms had been disposed to his satisfaction. Then impulsively, and as if he had for the moment forgotten the lady's presence, he bent over his dead comrade and whispered,

"Good-bye, Laurie! We'll always give the other fellows a chance—always after this."

He turned and hurried away then, but Barbara's heart, touched and strangely comforted by the unexpected visit, echoed his promise. A chance for the other boys therefore held a large place in all

the plans for the future, and Barbara understood when Mrs. Holland suddenly remarked, after a brief silence,

"And while she is there—I mean your friend Jeannette—while she is at the Barracks, she may be able to help us with that night-school for the mill-boys."

There had been many changes made—not noisy or sensational, such as attract the world's attention, but none the less radical because of that—and weeks of steady, often difficult or perplexing, but determined work; then, when the spring had deepened into summer, Clinton Holland sought Petra one day. The mill at the village had known no visit from him that year, nor had he written beyond brief business letters in reply to Mr. Dorsey. Something of what he was doing his friends knew, and surmised more, because of a communication from Colonel Holland to the Rev. John Kent informing him that a certain sum—a very handsome one, it seemed to the unworldly village pastor—had been placed to his credit as the payment, principal and interest, of what was rightfully his. That was one of the old tangles which it had been hard to straighten and set right after this lapse of time, and to do it in such fashion that no taint of "the ac-

cursed thing," as John Kent had more than once called the liquor traffic in his cousin's hearing, should cling to it. It was proof of Bradley Holland's intense earnestness and sincerity that he had so patiently sought to unravel this web, and his exact and scrupulous statement of how it had been done showed his desire fully to satisfy his cousin's conscience as well as his own. The gain to himself John Kent almost lost sight of in his gladness at the marvelous change that had been wrought in the man, and yet the former meant power to carry out many cherished plans. He and his mother rejoiced together over that letter; and when he carried it to Kitty, she listened with shining eyes.

"Dear Laurence! The sorrow that came through his death has surely been, as you suggested it might be, the opening of a door," she said.

But the whole story of what had been done and purposed Clinton Holland told to Petra when he came. He told her more, going back that summer day, over life-pages that no one else had known—of how the belief he did not want to entertain had pressed upon him day by day and would not be shaken off; of how his mother's prayers had grown to a veritable presence that haunted him like an angel with a drawn sword, barring his way; of

how in late years the accumulating wealth had palled upon him and he had found little pleasure in anything it could bring. He had acquired the reputation of being cynical and unsocial, but he had held to his solitary life because he shrank from the thought of attempting to build a home upon such a foundation. He remembered how his mother had suffered. Whatever he had thought of it in earlier life, he comprehended her feelings more clearly now, and it seemed to him that any pure, noble woman must in great measure share it. He would burden no other life by linking it with his; he would bring no one else under this heavy shadow.

"And even now, Petra, you see what it is I have asked you to share—the semblance of wealth without its reality? For, though we have eliminated from our business everything that has to do with this traffic in any form, yet that cannot cancel the past. Principal and interest is a heavy computation when it comes to such a matter as this, but we have decided, Bradley and I, that it must be undertaken, nevertheless. What originally came from the poor, the weak, the helpless, that, with all its accumulations, must go back to them. We hold a fortune, indeed, but we hold it in trust for others."

"Which, after all, is only saying that you hold it as every Christian ought to hold whatever wealth he has," said Petra.

Mr. Holland shook his head:

"If it were only that, the building of asylums, of schools, of mills would be a delight, the joy of blessing humanity. But we cannot be benefactors, though we have often to wear that title undeserved. We are debtors."

"So said Paul," answered Petra, smiling at the familiar words, "and he counted himself, with all that he could give and do, 'not meet to be called an apostle' because he had 'persecuted the Church of God and wasted it.' That God can overrule even our sins and bring good out of our evil does not lessen our guilt, I know, but it is a comfort to feel that he does so overrule. I doubt if the great apostle would ever have been quite what he was—such a power for good—had it not been for that past which made him always feel himself to be a 'debtor.'"

"Then you do not fear this task that we have undertaken—do not fear, as I have sometimes been almost ready to fancy, that a curse rests upon this gold, and that it can never bring good either to ourselves or to others?"

"That is morbid," Petra's clear voice answered, decidedly. "'The blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from all sin.' Gifts and offerings cannot atone, indeed, but there is no need that they should; he has done that once for all. And if a soul that has consciously and willfully sinned may be purified and made fit for his service, will he ban the gold that is neither good nor evil except as it is used? Do not believe it."

Petra and Clinton had been talking under the old apple tree, the gnarled and twisted tree that still threw its shadows over the grass. As they walked slowly toward the house Kitty's voice, reading to grandpa from one of the old books that he loved, floated out to them through the open window. Petra looked up with a quick smile, and the grave face above hers brightened as they caught the words:

"Guided by hands they did not see,
By voices called to them unknown,
Strange opening doors of circumstance,
Small happenings that were never chance,
God's daily, hourly providence,
Led in his way, and not their own."





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